IMAGERY IN TWENTY-FIVE POEMS OF BROWNING

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Thesis

IMAGERY IN TWENTY-FIVE POEMS OF BROWNING

by

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INTRODUCTION

From the poems studied in a course on Browning, twenty-five have been selected. The images in these poems have been catalogued according to the subject matter. Since these poems are only a small portion of the great body of Browning's poetry, any evidence about imagery found is indicative rather than conclusive.

The fourth chapter discusses the images found in Book One of The Ring and the Book, for the purpose of noting whether its predominant images follow the tendencies found in the other poems.

The poems, while not all the well known poems of Browning, are among his familiar work. Their dates of publication range from 1845 to 1868.

Done in a much more restricted manner, this thesis is inspired by Part One of Caroline Spurgeon's Shakespeare's Imagery and What It Tells Us.

As Miss Spurgeon has pointed out, imagery reveals not only what has impressed the writer, but the objects which are so firmly engraved upon his mind, that he uses them to make clearer the meaning of some statement not directly related to the object.

Although from such a limited selection of poems, it would not be fair to Browning to make generalizations, one can at least gain an impression of certain trends in Browning's poetry.

The definition of imagery used in this paper has been confined to the one which Caroline Spurgeon uses.

> An image is the little word picture used by the poet or prose writer to illustrate, illuminate, and embellish his thought. It is a description or an idea which by comparison or analogy, stated or understood, with something else transmits to us through the emotions and associations it arouses something of the 'wholeness', the depth, and the richness of the way the writer views, conceives, or has felt what he is telling us.[1]

The discussion has been divided into six sections:

1. Images from humanity, that is images that are based on the poet's interest in men and women and all the things that are the products of civilization.
2. Images that are based on the love of color and light.
3. Images of touch and form which might be called images of a sculptor.

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[1]Spurgeon, Caroline, "Shakespeare's Imagery and What It Tells Us". Macmillan Co., New York, 1938, p. 9.

4. Images from nature, although Browning is not a nature poet in the usual sense.
5. Imagery from Book One of The Ring and the Book.
6. A conclusion is drawn from the evidence in the previous chapters. This conclusion is compared to a few critical comments on Browning's imagery.

The poems used as a basis for the discussion of Browning's imagery are: "Pippa Passes", "Love Among the Ruins", "A Lovers' Quarrel", "Up in a Villa--Down in the City", "A Toccata of Galuppi's", "Home Thoughts from Abroad", "Saul", "My Star", "By the Fireside", Two in the Campagna", "A Serenade at the Villa", "Prospice", "The Glove", "The Boy and the Angel", "The Italian in England", "The Englishman in Italy", "A Grammarian's Funeral", "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came", "Pictor Ignotus", "Fra Lippo Lippi", "Andrea Del Sarto", "The Bishop Orders His Tomb", "Abt Vogler", "Rabbi Ben Ezra", "Caliban Upon Setebos".

CHAPTER I

IMAGES FROM HUMANITY

Browning enjoyed society. "Up in a Villa--Down in the City" is in part an expression of his own desire to be among men and women. His love of society was not that of a literary hero who likes to attend gatherings to hear his praises sung. His was a genuine enjoyment of his fellow men whether in great crowds or as single individuals. Therefore, it is natural that he would be a poet of human personality. Almost all of his poetry concerns itself with revealing the soul of some human being.

Not only in his choice of subject, but also in his imagery, his acute observation of and absorption in human beings is revealed. He doesn't confine himself to figures of speech which use men and women or parts of the human body or personification. All things that are the products of civilized life are frequently the subjects of his images. Anything that has been reshaped by the hand of man or called into service by his ingenuity is more attractive to Browning than are the untouched natural beauties. Things that might often be considered unpoetic have great meaning for Browning simply because they are a part of man's daily life.

General Human Imagery

By general human imagery is meant figures of speech, excepting personification, which have people as their subjects.

It is traditional for a poet to illustrate the actions of people by drawing on nature or animals to create metaphors or similes. Browning is apt to turn the tables and create a figure of speech using a person or a part of the body to make more vivid a non-living thing. The bishop of Saint Praxed's Church pleads that, poised between the knees of his corpse, his sons will place:

> Some lump, ah God of lapis lazuli
> Big as a Jew's head cut off at the nape
> Blue as a vein o'er the Madonna's breast[1]

The final caution of the dying clergyman to his materialistic sons is that when they leave his tomb, they go:

> "like departing altar-ministrants"[2]

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[1] Browning, Robert, The Complete Poetic and Dramatic Works of Robert Browning, Cambridge Edition. Boston, N.Y., 1895. "The Bishop Orders His Tomb at Saint Praxed's Church", p. 348. (All quotations from Browning's poetry which appear in this thesis will be from the edition mentioned in this footnote.)

[2] "The Bishop Orders His Tomb at Saint Praxed's Church", p. 349.

Childe Roland explains his fear of success and his half desire to fail by the simile of a sick man who seems very near death. His friends bid him tearful farewells and outside his room make funeral plans.

"And still the man bears all and only craves
He may not shame such tender love and stay."[3]

Not only to explain his own feelings, but to describe the plane which he crosses, the knight turns to human imagery.

"As for the grass it grew as scant as hair
In leprosy."[4]

To go on with the struggle Roland feels that he must reflect on happier memories. In the words of the poet:

I shut my eyes and turned them on my heart.
As a man calls for wine before he fights
I asked one draught of earlier happier sights.[5]

Here there is a blending of two of Browning's favorite images, human beings and wine.

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[3] "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came", p. 287.

[4] "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came", p. 287.

[5] "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came", p. 284.

In his quest the knight must ford a small river. He thrusts his spear to discover any hollows. The weapon tangles in some weeds which the knight compares to the hair and beard of a dead man. While prodding, his spear strikes some creature which cries out. Roland says,

"It may have been a water rat I speared,
But, ugh, it sounded like a baby's shriek"

The plain seems to have been ravaged by some fierce struggle. The traveler wonders what can have caused creatures to have fought so furiously. His thoughts are voiced again in a simile:

. . . . . , . . Mad brewage set to work
Their brains, no doubt, like galley-slaves the Turk
Pits for his pastime, Christians against Jews.[7]

The ugly surface of the plain is described in the terms of a diseased skin.

"Now patches where some leanness of the soil's
Broke into moss or substances like boils."[8]

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[6] "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came", p.288.

[7] "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came", p.288.

[8] "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came", p.288.

The rest of the stanza is more human imagery:

> Then came some palsied oak, a cleft in him
> Like a distorted mouth that splits its rim,
> Gaping at death and dies while it recoils.[9]

For the second time within a single poem, an image is used which refers to human death. Early in the poem the hero compares his fear of success to a dying man's fear of recovery. New the cleft in the oak recalls the twisted mouth of a dying person. These might be offered as some evidence that Browning uses all facets of human life in his imagery.

The last human image in the poem might be considered to be more "poetic" in the common use of the term.

> "The hills like giants at a hunting, lay;
> Chin upon hand, to see the game at bay"[10]

At times Browning uses a double human imagery. There is an example of this in "The Englishman in Italy".

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[9] "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came", p. 288.

[10] "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came", p. 289.

Over all trod my mules with the caution
Of gleaners o'er sheaves
Still, foot after foot like a lady
Till round after round
He climbed to the top of Calvano[11]

This is a very observant and descriptive image of the careful treading of a mule up in a mountain slope.

Caliban, the semi-monster, uses an image taken from human anatomy.

" . . . . a pompion plant
Coating the cave top as a brow its eye"[12]

Many poets have used botanical images such as a flower to describe the beauty or a person's eyes, but Browning reverses the procedure. Browning's close observation of nature does not lead him to the use of a nature image; instead it suggests the position of the human brow and eye. In his imagery a poet reveals the things that have impressed him most. The use of an image from the human face to describe the proximity of the plant to the cave indicates how complete is Browning's absorption in human beings.

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[11] "The Englishman in Italy", p. 261.

[12] "Caliban Upon Setebos", p. 392.

> I know not too well how I found my way
> home in the night.
> There were witnesses, cohorts about me,
> to left and to right,
> Angels, powers, the unuttered, unseen,
> the alive, the aware:
> I repressed, I got through them as hardly,
> as strugglingly there,
> As a runner beset by the populace famished
> for news--
> Life or death.[13]

The inspired David, returning from his visit to Saul, tries to express the reality of his inspiration. He explains how difficult it was for him to pass through the angel bands by mentioning a figure that was familiar and important in the ancient world, the runner who would tell the anxious people what turn events had taken.

Browning is fond of active human beings. He is also fond of decisive moments. Most of his dramatic monologues depict a man or woman at some kind of turning point in his or her life. The image of the runner fulfills all these requirements. No moment could be more climactic than the time at which the city learns of its fate. It could be one of great rejoicing or of extreme

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[13] "Saul", p. 184.

sorrow. The person who can resolve the suspense is the kind of figure that Browning admires. A situation similar to the one suggested in this brief image is created in detail in the poem "How They Brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix". Essentially the same type of human figures are the subjects of Browning's poems and of his images. The runner is again used in a simile in "Abt Vogler".

> For higher and still higher (as a runner tips with fire
> When a great illumination surprises a festal night--
> Outlined round and round Rome's dome from spire to spire"[14]

An image like the runner in "Saul", which employs the solitary figure engaging the attention of the mob, is used in "Pictor Ignotus". The painter feels that he would shrink from the judgment and attention of the public:

> "Shrinking as from the soldiery a nun"[15]

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[14] "Abt Vogler", p. 382.

[15] "Pictor Ignotus", p. 342.

Perhaps it would be difficult to find a better image to show the recoil of a single person from a group than this. It is far more than a withdrawal caused by fear. It is a completely different outlook on life, an inability of each vocation to understand the other's path that causes the shrinking. Moreover, it is individual personality which fears domination by mob psychology which is more emotional than reasonable. This is the identical retiring of the sensitive artist from the favorable or unfavorable critics of his work.

The phrase "new born babe" is a rather commonplace expression. At times Browning seems to delight in cliches. Fra Lippo Lippi, while repeating the conversation of his superiors, gives this definition of the soul:

"It is vapor done up like a new born babe"[16]

Pippa sings a song using the same phrase to describe an old king. He was:

"Only calm as a babe new-born"[17]

Before condemning this imagery as merely trite, we should try to see if there is a deliberate purpose in these images.

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[16] "Fra Lippo Lippi", p. 344.

[17] "Pippa Passes", p. 140.

Pippa is supposed to be a simple child. The monks who are defining the soul are giving their explanation to a brother they consider a bit dull or confused, so they try to speak plainly. They attempt to illustrate an unseen substance in visual terms that he could paint. Thus on the grounds of correct character portrayal these seemingly poor human images may be excused.

All simple images need not be dull or unimaginative. "Pippa Passes" contains a simple human image that is quite effective.

"And counted your stars, the seven and one,
Like the fingers of my hand"[18]

This image gives a sense of closeness to the universe. The girl's simple sincere faith in the well being of the world is echoed in this confident little image.

In the same poem Luigi, suspicious of eavesdroppers, cries out:

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[18] "Pippa Passes", p. 144.

> . . . what are those?
> Mere withered wallflowers waving overhead?
> They seem an elvish group with thin bleached
> hair
> That lean out of their topmost fortress - -look
> And listen mountain men, to what we say,
> Hand under chin of each grave earthy face.
> Up and show faces all of you! --"All of you!
> That's the king dwarf with the scarlet comb;
> old Franz,
> Come down and meet your fate?[19]

The sculptor Jules creates an even more poetic image as he describes to his bride the "unsuspected isle in the far seas".

> Like a god going through his world there stands
> One mountain for a moment in the dusk,
> While brotherhoods of cedars on its brow:[20]

It seems fair to call this human imagery although the mountain is compared to a god, because he is a member of the ancient diety. Such a god in classical literature was only a glorified man. Moreover, in the latter part of this image the mountain is described as having a brow -- a distinctly human feature. In another part of the poem a human image is created around another supernatural creature. The lightning flashed:

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[19] "Pippa Passes", p. 139.

[20] "Pippa Passes", p. 138.

"As if God's messenger through the close
wood screen
Plunged and replunged his weapon at a
venture"[21]

Occasionally the image is expressed by a single word as "each fleshy blossom"[22]. More often the image is a long or an involved one. Browning will combine biblical or classical allusions with personification and general human imagery to give the reader a wealth of pictures.

Would that the structure brave, the manifold
music I build,
Bidding my organ obey, calling its keys to
their work
Claiming each slave of the sound, at a touch
as when Solomon willed
Armies of angels that soar, legions of demons
that lurk,
Man, brute, reptile, fly, alien of end and of
aim,
Adverse, each from the other heaven high,
hell-deep removed, - -
Should rush into sight at one as he named the
ineffable Name,
And pile him a palace straight, to pleasure
the princess he loved! [23]

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[21] "Pippa Passes", p. 132.

[22] "Pippa Passes", p. 129.

[23] "Abt Vogler", p. 382.

Once again in "A Lovers' Quarrel" Browning's human image involves a figure who has appeared elsewhere in literature. November's winds might threaten but,

> I would laugh like the valiant Thumb
> Facing the castle glum
> And the giant's fee - faw - fum![24]

These foregoing examples of Browning's use of human imagery taken from twenty-five representative poems are offered as evidence that images whose subjects are human beings or parts of the human body are used very extensively in Browning's poetry.

Personification

Personification, which will be treated in the following pages, is found much more frequently than human imagery involving other kinds of figurative language.

Browning personifies some inanimate or brute creatures more frequently than others. In this chapter we will discuss the personification according to the object personified.

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[24] "A Lovers' Quarrel", p. 173.

Seasons and months are frequently made animate by the poet. Luigi talks about:

> Great noontides, thunder-storms, all glaring pomps
> That triumph at the heels of June the god
> Leading his revel through our leafy world.[25]

In the same poem Pippa sings:

> "June reared that bunch of flowers you carry,
>
> From seeds of April's sowing"[26]

The colder months are given harsher personalities:

> Could but November come,
> Were the noisy birds struck dumb
> At the warning slash
> Of his driver's-lash - -[27]

Spring becomes an archer:

> "Have ye seen when Spring's arrowy summons
>
> goes right to the aim,"[28]

Summer is equally athletic:

> You've summer all at once,
> In a day he leaps complete with a few short April suns
> 'Mid the sharp short emerald wheat . . . .[29]

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[25] "Pippa Passes", p. 140.

[26] "Pippa Passes", p. 140.

[27] "A Lovers' Quarrel", p. 173.

[28] "Saul", p. 181

[29] "Up at a Villa - -Down in the City", p. 174.

Plants and flowers are endowed with human characteristics in many of the poems under consideration.

Among the remains of an ancient civilization much is ruins:

"While the patching houseleek's head of
blossom winks
Through the chinks."[30]

David has been inspired and in all of nature he can see the effect of the divine intervention.

"The same stared in the white humid faces
upturned by the flowers"[31]

Gazing upon the free growing, almost lush landscape of the campagna, the onlooker calls the flowers:

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[30] "Love Among the Ruins", p. 172.

[31] "Saul", p. 184.

"Such primal naked forms of flowers

Such letting nature have her way"[32]

"The Englishman in Italy" observes:

And dark rosemary ever a-dying
That, 'spite the wind's wrath
So loves the salt rock's face to seaward[33]

Here there is really a personification of three objects - - the rosemary, the wind, and the salt rock.

Childe Roland comes upon botanical specimens which are endowed with the vices and misery of their surroundings.

If there pushed any ragged thistle-stalk
Above its mates, the head was chopped; the bents
Were jealous else . . . [34]

All along,
Low scrubby alders kneeled down over it:
Drenched willows flung them headlong in a fit
Of mute despair, a suicidal throng:

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[32] "Two in the Campagna", p. 188.

[33] "The Englishman in Italy", p. 161

[34] "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came", p.287.

> The river which had done them all the wrong
> What'er that was, rolled by, deterred no whit.[35]

This is more than the traditional personification. In these few lines is created a whole atmosphere of despair and desperation on one hand, and of complete unfeelingness on the other.

Birds are the subjects of personification four times in "Pippa Passes". Luigi notes the season of the year through the song of the cuckoo. While he discusses his fateful decision to be an assassin of an Austrian oppressor, the notes of the bird penetrate his mind. To himself he says:

> (Sure, he's arrived,
> The tell-tale cuckoo: spring's his confidant,
> And he lets out her April purposes!)[36]

The quotation could be catalogued as another personification of spring.

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[35] "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came", p.288.

[36] "Pippa Passes", p. 140.

Less than one hundred lines later the first poor girl observes:

> "There goes a swallow to Venice - - the stout seafarer"[37]

Finally Pippa herself speaks to her feathered friend. Here is a long image, personifying not only the lark, but also the mavis, merle, throstle, owl, and bat. Her imagination sees the owls as monks and the bats as nuns.

> Oh lark, be day's apostle
> To mavis, merle and throstle,
> Bid them their betters jostle
> From day and its delights!
> But at night, brother owlet, over the woods,
> Tell the world thy chantry;
> Sing to the bats' sleek sisterhoods
> Full complines with gallantry:
> Then owls and bats
> Cowls and twats,
> Monks and nuns in a cloister's mood,
> Adjourn to the oak-stump pantry.[38]

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[37] "Pippa Passes", p. 140.

[38] "Pippa Passes", p. 144-145.

In the other poems analyzed there is no such extensive use of birds as the subjects of personification. However, a single example is found in "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came". The knight talks about:

"A great black bird
Apollyon's bosom friend"

Day or some part of the day is another subject of personification which can be frequently pointed out. At the beginning of the poem, "Pippa Passes", Pippa often addresses day as a person. Here is an example:

For, Day, my holiday, if thou ill-usest
Me, who am only Pippa, -- old year's sorrow,
Cast off last night, will come again to-morrow:
Whereas, if thou prove gentle, I shall borrow
Sufficient strength of thee for new-year's sorrow.[39]

The opening line of "Love Among the Ruins" personifies evening.

"Where the quiet colored end of evening smiles."[40]

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[39] "Pippa Passes", p. 129.

[40] "Love Among the Ruins", p. 171.

Later in the poem:

"And I know, while thus the quiet-colored eve
Smiles to leave . . . [41]

"Saul", a poem which is the source of many beautiful images, supplies a very picturesque image of dawn as a wrestler.

"The dawn struggling with night on his
shoulder . . ."[42]

Again from "Saul" there is another dawn image.

". . . but I saw it die out in the day's tender
birth"[43]

Earth and nature take on human aspects in Browning's poetry. Because it is her holiday, Pippa thinks the minutes pass:

"As if earth turned from work in gamesome mood"[44]

"A Serenade at the Villa" finds the world with a different disposition:

"Earth turned in her sleep with pain"[45]

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[41] "Love Among the Ruins", p. 172.

[42] "Saul", p. 182.

[43] "Saul", p. 184.

[44] "Pippa Passes", p. 129.

[45] "A Serenade at the Villa", p. 189.

Rabbi Ben Ezra refers to:

". . . all, the world's coarse thumb
And finger failed to plumb."[46]

In English literature it is rather common to find death treated as a person. It is to be expected that Browning, who does not shun any phase of life and who tends toward the grotesque, would follow this tradition.

The following quotation might have been included as a simile under general human imagery, but like many of Browning's images, it is complex enough to be considered in more than one category. It is a simile to compare the cypress to Death's forefinger. Nevertheless, death is being personified when a finger is attributed to it.

"Yon cypress that points like death's lean lifted forefinger."[47]

In another poem we find the line:

"Death stepped tacitly and took them where they never see the sun"[48]

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[46] "Rabbi Ben Ezra", p. 385.

[47] "Up at a Villa--Down in the City", p. 174.

[48] "A Toccata of Galuppi's", p. 175.

The Renaissance grammarian was dedicated to learning,

> "So with the throttling hands of death at strife
> Grounded he at grammar"[49]

The entire poem "Prospice" treats death as an individual. A couple of verses that prove this treatment are:

> "I would hate that death bandaged my eyes and forebore
> And bade me creep past"[50]

Personification of places is not as frequent as some other subjects, but there are still numerous instances.

To Browning, Italy is a woman. The young Italian in hiding tells the peasant girl:

> . . . we have done
> Our mother service - - I, the son
> And you the daughter, of our land![51]

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[49] "A Grammarian's Funeral", p. 280.

[50] "Prospice", p. 395.

[51] "The Italian in England", p. 259.

The old man beside his fire musing upon his youth in Italy addresses her:

> O woman-country, wooed not wed,
> Loved all the more by earth's male lands,
> Laid to their hearts instead! [52]

Sometimes the place personified is only a single house. Sibald tells Otima that he had oft noted that:

> ". . . your house was mute, would open no eye!"[53]

It may be a whole town that takes on human aspect.

> "Do you feel thankful, ay or no,
> For this fair town's face . . . ?"[54]

The other instances of personification have scattered subject matter. Among the most sensual and imaginative of all the personifications discussed is Andrea Del Sarto's statement to his wife:

> "Your soft hand is a woman of itself
> And mine the man's bared breast she curls
> inside."[55]

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[52] "By the Fireside", p. 185.

[53] "Pippa Passes", p. 131.

[54] "Fra Lippo Lippi", p. 344.

[55] "Andrea Del Sarto", p. 346.

At times Browning's personifications are not as original as the one above. In "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came" Nature is personified as a peevish excuser of her own actions. This is, of course, an image which is used by many writers.

To endow snow with a hypnotic influence on the earth is rather good characterization:

> When the mesmerizer Snow
> With his hand's first sweep
> Put the earth to sleep.[56]

Mountains have particular appeal to Browning. Within this group of poems, he has personified mountains twice.

Childe Roland observes:

> ". . . a tall scalped mountain."

Once more "Saul" supplies a beautiful image.

> Have ye seen when Spring's goes right to the aim
> And some mountain, the last to withstand her,
> (he alone
> While the vale laughed in freedom and flowers) on
> a broad bust of snow
> A year's snow bound about for a breastplate,--
> leaves grasp of the sheet?

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[56] "A Lovers' Quarrel", p. 173.

Fold on fold all at once it crowds thunderously
down to his feet,
And there fronts you, stark, black, but alive
yet, your mountain of old,
With his rents, the successive bequeathings of
ages untold-
Yea, each harm got in fighting your battles, each
furrow and scar
Of his head thrust 'twixt you and the tempest - -
all hail, there they are! [57]

Actually this is a cluster image, containing many things besides personification, but at this point we shall consider only the personification. The personification is very complete. The reader gets a picture of the mountain as a great old battle scarred warrior. It is a beautiful and descriptive imagery.

Browning makes many objects take on human qualities. Whether it is,

"In the shuddering forests' held breath"[58]

or the curiosity of the peeking toad-stools:

By the rose-flesh mushrooms, undivulged
Last evening -- nay, in to-day's first dew
Yon sudden coral nipple bulged,
Where a freaked fawn-colored flaky crew
Of toad-stools peep indulged.[59]

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[57] "Saul", p. 181.

[58] "Saul", p. 184.

[59] "By the Fireside", p. 185.

Sometimes it is the teeth of inanimate objects that give them a human quality:

". . . and small ferns fit
Their teeth to the polished block"[60]

The gate in this quotation uses its teeth to express temper:

". . . the iron gate
Ground its teeth to let me pass!"[61]

Even the sun can take on ugly qualities:

". . . all the day
Had been a dreary one at best and dim
Was settling to its close, yet shot one grim
Red leer to see the plain catch its estray.[62]

When the environment is pleasant the sun has more agreeable qualities.

"Meanwhile, what lights my sunbeam on,
Where settles by degrees the radiant cripple?"[63]

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[60] "By the Fireside", p. 185.

[61] "A Serenade at the Villa", p. 190.

[62] "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came", p. 287.

[63] "Pippa Passes", p. 129.

Even the jewels on Saul's turban have human virtues:

> "All its lordly male-sapphires, and rubies
> courageous at heart."[64]

Not only non-living objects or plants may be personified but abstract qualities lend themselves to this kind of imagery. Roland says:

> . . . my hope
> Dwindled into a ghost not fit to cope
> With that obstreperous joy success would bring,-[65]

The unknown painter visualizes hope as gaining in strength.

> Whether Hope rose at once in all the blood
> A-tiptoe for the blessing of embrace,
> Or Rapture drooped the eyes . . .
> Or Confidence lit swift the forehead up[66]

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[64] "Saul", p. 180.

[65] "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came", p. 287.

[66] "Pictor Ignotus", p. 341.

Even silence is endowed with a body:

> ". . . then silence grows
> To that degree, you half believe
> It must get rid of what it knows,
> Its bosom does so heave.[67]

Attributing human qualities to God perhaps does not properly come under personification, but a few examples might be mentioned here to illustrate a point. Even when dealing with God, Browning at times attributes to Him very human professions or qualities. Now it is quite natural to draw God to our own image (the poet's own point in Caliban), but Browning is thinking in very specific human terms when he calls God "a potter"[68] or "builder and maker of houses".[69]

In these two sections there have been approximately seventy-five illustrations of human imagery, either as personification or some other figure of speech (generally a metaphor or simile) which involved human beings or a part of the body. Considered with the man-made things which will be discussed in the next section, they can be offered as proof that Browning shows as much interest in people in his imagery as he does in his subject matter.

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[67] "By the Fireside", p. 186.

[68] "Rabbi Ben Ezra", p. 385.

[69] "Abt Vogler", p. 383.

Manufactured Objects

In the poems studied there are over seventy-five images whose subjects are man-made objects or substances which take their importance from their use by human beings. These images usually fall into groups according to the subjects.

Over and over again the cup is used to form an effective image. The cup is one of the distinguishing marks of Browning's poetry. Although the analogy is clear, when the poet uses the cup figuratively, it is often used in manner that shows that the poet is "cup-conscious". By this I mean that he is extremely aware of this and other man-made objects, whatever phase of life he is depicting.

The cups of Browning's poetry are often brimming or over-flowing with liquid. One of the best known examples of the cup imagery is found in the opening lines of "Pippa Passes":

> Day!
> Faster and more fast,
> O'er night's brim, day boils at last:
> Boils, pure gold, o'er the cloud-cup's brim
> Where spurting and surpressed it lay,
> For not a froth flake touched the rim

Of yonder gap in the solid gray
Of the eastern cloud, an hour away;
But forth one wavelet, then another, curled,
Till the whole sunrise, not to be suppressed,
Rose reddened, and its seething breast
Flickered in bounds, grew gold then overflowed
the world.[70]

While containing far more than mere cup imagery, this figurative and highly poetic beginning makes the sun a golden liquid which boils over a cup formed of clouds.

David expresses Saul's hesitation to accept the goodness of life with these words:

Song filled to the verge
His cup with the wine of this life pressing all
that it yields
Of mere fruitage, the strength and the beauty
beyond, on what fields
Glean a vintage more potent and perfect to
brighten the eye
And bring blood to the lip, and commend them the
cup they put by?
He saith "It is good;" still he drinks not . . .[71]

From a more involved image in "By the Fireside" the following is taken. The crimson creeper's leaf had been laid on a

". . . fairy-cupped
Elf-needled mat of moss"[72]

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[70] "Pippa Passes", p. 129.

[71] "Saul", p. 181.

[72] "By the Fireside", p. 185.

In the fertile Campagna

"one small orange cup amassed five beetles"[73]

The poet seems to think of many flowers as cups:

Some burnt sprig of bold hardy rock-flower
Its yellow face up,
For the prize were great butterflies fighting,
Some five for one cup"[74]

The unknown painter speaking of the ability he had to paint says:

"O human faces, hath it spilt, my cup?

What did ye give me that I have not saved?"[75]

Here the cup describes a non-material thing, a talent which could have been lost or spilt.

In the poem, "Rabbi Ben Ezra", man is spoken of as a cup in several verses:

"Thou, heaven's consummate cup, what needst thou with earth's wheel?"[76]

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[73] "Two in the Campagna", p. 189.

[74] "The Englishman in Italy", p. 260.

[75] "Pictor Ignotus", p. 341.

[76] "Rabbi Ben Ezra", p. 385.

Again:

"My times be in thy hand
 Perfect the cup as planned"[77]

Wine imagery appeals greatly to Browning. If one were forced to pick just a few images that were distinctly Browningesque, wine would certainly be on the list. Some of its attractiveness may be due to the traditional red color of wine (although he speaks of white and black wine in "Pippa Passes"[78]).

"His cup with the wine of this life pressing all
 that yields
 Of mere fruitage . . ."[79]

In a long simile comparing the palm tree to man's body David praises the juice of the dates.

The palm-wine shall staunch
Every wound of man's spirit in winter.
I pour thee such wine.[80]

Here the comfort which he offers to Saul is wine.

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[77] "Rabbi Ben Ezra", p. 385.

[78] "Pippa Passes", p. 131.

[79] "Saul", p. 181.

[80] "Saul", p. 182.

The deeds of Saul that will spread even after his death are compared to wine running from the crushed fruit:

> Crush that life and behold its wine running!
> Each deed thou hast done
> Dies, revives, goes to work in the world . . .[81]

David reminds Saul of the rewards of life after death with the introduction:

> "Again a long draught of my soul-wine"[82]

Brothers working together and competing with one another help each to grow as fermentation of grapes results in good wine.

> "And thy brothers, the help and the contest, the working whence grew
> Such results as from seething grape bundles the spirit strained true:"[83]

The wine image in "Pippa Passes" has a very different connotation. Sibald, whose conscience and passion are at war, is disturbed by the memories Ottima is reviving. He admonishes:

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[81] "Saul", p. 182.

[82] "Saul", p. 182.

[83] "Saul", p. 181.

Less vehemently! Love me!
Forgive me! Take not words, mere words to heart!
Your breath is worse than wine,
Breathe slow, speak slow![84]

Fra Lippo Lippi, a merrymaker, says that his loosened tongue was caused by:

"Tasting the air this spicy night which turns
The unaccustomed head like Chianti wine"[85]

The bishop, who has the Renaissance dislike of any material that does not have excellent quality, compares rare fine stone with wine to illustrate its perfection.

"Peach-blossom marble all, the rare, the ripe
As fresh-poured red wine of a mighty pulse"[86]

Rabbi Ben Ezra describes man as a cup. Among the uses of this cup are to hold wine. Immediately following this line he speaks about the "Master's lips aglow". It is to be inferred that the wine is the deeds or virtues of a man's life which are offered to God, as wine from a cup.

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[84] "Pippa Passes", p. 133.

[85] "Fra Lippo Lippi", p. 345.

Look not thou down, but up!
To uses of a cup
The festal board, lamp's flash and trumpet's peal
The new wine'e foaming flow
The Master's lips aglow![87]

Food supplies Browning with much figurative language.

Among the heavenly uses of the cup (man's life) the Rabbi mentions "the festal board".[88]

The grammarian hungry for knowledge says:

Let me know all! Prate not of most or least
Painful or easy!
Even to the crumbs I'd fain eat up the feast
Ay, nor feel queasy.[89]

To an Italian of quality life in the city square is almost perfection.

"There, the whole day long, one's life is a perfect feast."[90]

The prior's chief complaint about Brother Lippi's paintings is that:

"Faces, arms, legs, and bodies like the true
As much as pea and pea"[91]

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[87] "Rabbi Ben Ezra", p. 385.

[88] "Rabbi Ben Ezra", p. 385.

[89] "The Grammarian's Funeral", p. 279.

[90] "Up at a Villa--Down in the City", p. 174.

[91] "Fra Lippo Lippi", p.343.

The monk himself calls the night "spicy"[92].

"One block pure green as a pistachio-nut"[93] is the way the bishop describes the jasper he desires.

The Italian gentlemen longs to be in the city to see "the new play piping hot"[94]. This phrasing certainly is taken from a description of food ready to be consumed.

Jules, the sculptor, exclaims:

"But marble! - 'neath my tools
More pliable than jelly. . ."[95]

Many of these images may be classified as battle equipment. Not the war gear of his own age, but the fighting equipment of the medieval period supplies figures for his poems.

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[92] "Fra Lippo Lippi", p. 343.

[93] "The Bishop Orders His Tomb at Saint Praxed's Church", p. 348.

[94] "Up at a Villa--Down in the City, p. 174.

[95] "Pippa Passes", p. 136.

Once more it is the young David who utters a very striking simile.

"Then I tuned my harp,--took off the lilies we twine round its chords
Lest they snap 'neath the stress of the noontide--those sunbeams like swords!"[96]

Even Satan is provided with a warrior's equipment:

"When a shaft from the devil's bow
Pierced to our ingle-glow"[97]

Caliban muses that his master, Prospero,

"Vexed, stitched a book of broad leaves, arrow-shaped"[98]

In the memorized speech of Jules's bride, we find these verses:

"How Love smiles through Hate's iron casque
Hate grins through Love's rose-braided mask"[99]
(A casque is a helmet.)

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[96] "Saul", p. 180.

[97] "A Lovers' Quarrel", p. 173.

[98] "Caliban Upon Setebos", p. 393.

[99] "Pippa Passes", p. 137.

The Rabbi, in his philosophical discourse on life, falls into war imagery:

> Fearless and unperplexed
> When I wage battle next,
> What weapons to select, what armor to indue.[100]

The creeper's leaf is compared to:

> " . . . a shield else gold from rim to boss."[101]

In the long beautiful mountain image in "Saul" there are really many images combined. Among these is one which heightens the allusion that the mountain is a fighter.

> "A year's snow bound about for a breastplate. . . ."[102]

> . . . see, in the evening glow,
> How sharp the silver spear-heads charge
> When Alp meets heaven in snow![103]

What an apt descriptive image to create a picture of the fading sunset's reflection on the snowy mountain peaks!

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[100] "Rabbi Ben Ezra", p. 384.

[101] "By the Fireside", p. 185.

[102] "Saul", p. 181.

[103] "By the Fireside", p. 185.

De Lorge "looked daggers upon"[104] his wife, who was too much in the king's favor.

These several examples serve as illustrations of Browning's employment of the weapons of the Middle Ages to serve as images in his poetry.

In the above group (battle equipment) many of the weapons such as the sword, the dagger, the spear, and the arrow were pointed. The poet's fondness for sharp things is further indicated by such manufactured articles as the knife and the wedge.

> "Instead of cramp couplets each like a knife
> in your entrails, he should write . . .
> intelligibly"[105]

The lover remembers:

> "When the wind would edge
> In and in his wedge"[106]

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[104] "The Glove", p. 258.

[105] "Pippa Passes", p. 134.

[106] "A Lovers' Quarrel", p. 172.

Other tools used by a craftsman are found among Browning's imagery--the "Potter's wheel"[107] of Rabbi Ben Ezra is familiar to even casual readers of Browning. The philosopher continues his advice calling:

> The present . . .
> Machinery just meant
> To give thy soul its bent,
> Try thee and turn thee forth, sufficiently
> impressed."[108]

About to die, the bishop regretfully admits that "Swift as a weaver's shuttle fleet our years."[109]

In some of the poems which have an Italian setting or return in memory, at least, to Italy, ecclesiastical articles are used.

> . . . even the single bee
> Persisting in his toil, suddenly stopped.
> And where he hid you only could surmise
> By some campanula chalice set a-swing"[110]

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[107] "Rabbi Ben Ezra", p. 385.

[108] "Rabbi Ben Ezra", p. 385.

[109] "The Bishop Orders His Tomb at St. Praxed's Church", p. 348.

[110] "Pippa Passes", p. 132.

The chalice is the cup in which the wine to be consecrated is poured.

The vessel used to burn incense before the altar, the censer figures in another poem.

> There, man's thought
> Rarer, intenser
> Self-gathered for an outbreak, as it ought
> Chafes in the censer.[111]

The Englishman promises to keep the Italian child amused until the storm is over:

> "With telling my memories over
> As you tell your beads"[112]

The old man at his fireside invites his wife to live over memories of youth in Italy with these lines:

> Come back with me to the first of all.
> Let us lean and love it over again
> Let us now forget and now recall,
> Break the rosary in pearly rain
> And gather what we let fall[113]

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[111] "A Grammarian's Funeral", p. 279.

[112] "The Englishman in Italy", p. 260.

[113] "By the Fireside", p. 186.

Buildings of various kinds are the subjects of several images.

Abt Vogler speaks of his musical composition as "this beautiful building of mine"[114]. A medieval structure figures in "Pictor Ignotus":

"Confidence lit swift the forehead up,
And locked the mouth fast, like a castle braved."[115]

Fra Lippo Lippi describes the earth as a "tomb".[116]

Going to a biblical source, the husband describes his marriage as:

"the house not built with hands."[117]

Twice the single room of the religious becomes an image. Gabriel:

"Entered the flesh, the empty cell[118]

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[114] "Abt Vogler", p. 382.

[115] "Pictor Ignotus", p. 341.

[116] "Fra Lippo Lippi", p. 342.

[117] "By the Fireside", p. 186.

[118] "The Boy and the Angel", p. 254.

The water runs:

". . . on the beryl bed

Paven smooth as a hermit's cell"[119].

The world in November is called "a bare-walled crypt"[120].

The dark sky is "the strained and tight tent of heaven"[121].

From Caliban's lips comes this bit of poetic fancy:

"'Esteemeth stars the outposts of its couch"[122].

In three instances curtains are used figuratively. Caliban exclaims:

". . . A curtain o'er the world at once!"[123]

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[119] "A Lovers' Quarrel", p. 172.

[120] "A Lovers' Quarrel", p. 173.

[121] "A Serenade at the Villa", p. 189.

[122] "Caliban Upon Setebos", p. 394.

[123] "Caliban Upon Setebos", p. 394.

The lover talks about the bareness of autumn as:

". . . the world's hangings ripped".[124]

Night is merely dark draperies:

"A moment after and bonds unseen
Were hanging the night around us fast."[125]

Here night is spoken of as though it were a curtain that could be hung or drawn around.

Another piece of common household furniture, the footstool, is mentioned. God talks about:

"New worlds that from my footstool go."[126]

Browning certainly is thinking of the interior of a house when he writes:

"Such a carpet as, this summertime, o'er spreads
And embeds
Every vestige of the city. . ."[127]

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[124] "A Lovers' Quarrel", p. 173.

[125] "By the Fireside", p. 187.

[126] "The Boy and the Angel", p. 254.

[127] "Love Among the Ruins", p. 172.

The other images come from all phases of men's lives or interests. It may be something as valuable as a jewel which can be a source of comparison, as "pare your nails pearlwise"[128] or:

"How gray at once is the evening grown
One star, its chrysolite!"[129]

At the other extreme it might be a very ordinary piece of clothing. Fra Lippo Lippi tells of his hardship with such a figure, -

"My stomach being empty as your hat."[130]

The image can come from a sport:

I shuffle sideways with my blushing face
Under the cover of a hundred wings
Thrown like a spread of kirtles when you're gay
And play hot cockles."[131]

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[128] "Pippa Passes", p. 144.

[129] "By the Fireside", p. 187.

[130] "Fra Lippo Lippi", p. 343.

[131] "Fra Lippo Lippi", p. 345.

Straight from a lady's dressing table, the poet took this simile:

"Lilies and vestments and white faces, sweet
As puff on puff of grated orris-root."[132]

A fine fabric may be used to complete a gruesome picture:

". . . that harrow fit to reel
Men's bodies out like silk?. . ."[133]

In another poem the silk image has another connotation:

". . . none with blue eyes and thick rings
Of raw-silk-colored hair."[134]

The bell becomes a figure of speech for either its sound:

"Not hear? when noise was everywhere! it tolled
Increasing like a bell . . ."[135]

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[132] Ibid., p. 345.

[133] "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came", p. 288.

[134] "Pippa Passes", p. 144.

[135] "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came", p. 289.

or its shape:

"The wild tulip, at end of its tube, blows out its great red bell."[136]

The numerous imagery supplied by artificial products includes diverse objects. By mentioning the man-made images in "Pippa Passes" which have not already been discussed the frequency and the variety of the imagery may be pointed out.

"I should rather account the plastered wall
A piece of him, so chilly does it strike."[137]

Thus does Ottima give her opinion of a passing monk.

Phene quotes some lines from her memorized speech:

I would plunge
My sword, and wipe with the first lunge
My foe's whole life out like a sponge-"[138]

Zanzi advised Pippa to get shoes "less like canoes"[139].

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[136] "Up at a Villa--Down in the City", p. 174.

[137] "Pippa Passes", p. 131.

[138] "Pippa Passes", p. 137.

[139] "Pippa Passes", p. 144.

Pippa herself compares human beings to a piece of their handiwork, marionettes:

"With God whose puppets, best and worst,
Are we; there is no last or first."[140]

These images considered with all the figures of speech based on fabricated goods previously mentioned prove that Browning considered almost nothing made or used by man too ordinary for poetic imagery.

These general human images, figures of personification, and figures based on manufactured objects make up a large portion of all the imagery in the twenty-five poems considered. There is hardly a poem that does not furnish one of more examples of each of the three types.

Considered together this thesis had studied nearly one hundred fifty examples of human imagery within twenty-five poems.

There is more than mere numerality to be taken into account. The range from a noble simile making a mountain

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[140]"Pippa Passes", p. 145.

like a god passing through the world to the cliches that a king is as calm as a new born babe, from the ugly but impressive image of twisting mouth of a dying person to something as merry as the artist friar's image of the game of cockles shows the catholicity of Browning's sympathy and understanding of people.

CHAPTER II

IMAGES OF LIGHT AND COLOR

There is an extensive use of color and light imagery in Browning's poetry. He does not have an epicurean delight of color, but he does have certain favorites which he employs over and over again. He splashes on bold bright colors-gold, red, or deepest black. A neutral color such as gray is used to signify quiet or dullness. Contrast in color appeals to the poet.

Blood imagery can be discussed better under color than under the grotesque. There are other qualities of blood such as its symbolic value which excites the poet's imagination, but with few exceptions it is not used to awaken any sense of horror.

Wine, considered previously, does have color value as well.

Most of the images classed here were used as much for their ability to give light as for their color. Power and inspiration for Browning are linked closely with light.

These images will be considered in this order-color, blood, sun, stars and flame.

Color

Although like all poets Browning uses colors frequently in him imagery, certain colors appear almost constantly while others are comparatively rare.

There is a vein of gold running through Browning's poems. Whether it is a woman's hair, the sunrise, or the notes of a trumpet, the poet is most likely to describe it as gold.

The very lovely opening passage of "Pippa Passes", which contains so many good examples of various images, must be employed once more. These lines, of course, are a description of the sunrise, a subject closely connected with gold imagery in Browning's poetry.

> O'er night's brim day boils at last:
> Boils pure gold, o'er the cloud-cup's brim
> Where spurting and suppressed it lay
> For not a froth-flake touched the rim
> Of yonder gap in the solid gray
> Of the eastern cloud . . .
> Till the whole sunrise not to be suppressed,
> Rose, reddened, and its seething breast
> Flickered in bounds, grew gold, then overflowed
> the world. [1]

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[1] "Pippa Passes", p. 129.

Even a beetle has the qualities of the precious metal:

> See how that beetle burnished in the path!
> There sparkles he along the dust: and there-
> Your journey to that maize-tuff spoiled at
> least![2]

To give an impression of the pomp and glory of an ancient civilization, it is recorded that it:

> "Yet reserved a thousand chariots in full force-
> Gold, of course."[3]

Notes for Abt Vogler, are:

> "Raising my rampired walls of gold as transparent
> as glass"[4]

Gold imagery appears twice in "The Glove". De Lorge is the flowery tongued courtier.

> . . . he sat there
> His suit weighing out with nonchalance
> Fine speeches like gold from a balance.[5]

The lady being courted was skeptical. Her test of his valor is:

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[2] "Pippa Passes", p. 141.

[3] "Love Among the Ruins", p. 172.

[4] "Abt Vogler", p. 382.

[5] "The Glove", p. 257.

As if she had tried in a crucible,
To what "speeches like gold" were reducible,
And finding the finest prove copper,
Felt the smoke in her face was but proper.[6]

The emperor takes a fair bride.

"There they sit ermine-stoled,

And she powders her hair with gold."[7]

All beautiful women in his poetry have golden hair.

"Dear dead women, with such hair too-

What's become of all the gold?"[8]

Andrea Del Sarto begs:

"Let me frame your face in your hair's gold."[9]

The young David's golden hair contrasts with the blue of the lilies:

". . . God's child with his dew

On thy gracious golden hair, and those lilies still living and blue."[10]

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[6] "The Glove", p. 257.

[7] "A Lovers' Quarrel", p. 173.

[8] "A Toccata of Galuppi's", p. 175.

[9] "Andrea Del Sarto", p. 347.

[10] "Saul", p. 179.

David tries to tempt Saul's appetite with:

"the rich dates yellowed over with gold dust divine."[11]

Even sound is qualified by this color:

"Blown harshly, keep the trumpets golden hue?"[12]

In the following image the use of gold and grey by Andrea Del Sarto as he relives his growing fame at the French court, illustrates the meaning each color has for the poet:

"To live the life grew, golden and not gray."[13]

Andrea's troubled conscience creates illusions:

When I look up from painting, eyes tired out,
The walls become illumined brick from brick
Distinct, instead of mortar, fierce bright gold,
That gold of his I did cement them with.[14]

Black is used often in these poems.

Pippa describes the beauty of Phene by color contrasts:

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[11] "Saul", p. 180

[12] "Fra Lippo Lippi", p. 342.

[13] "Andrea Del Sarto", p. 347.

[14] "Andrea Del Sarto", p. 347.

> Saw, if you call it seeing her, one flash
> Of the pale snow-pure cheek and black bright tresses,
> Blacker than all except the black eyelash.[15]

Here is still more color contrast:

> "This Odyssey in coarse black vivid type
>
> With faded yellow blossoms 'twixt page and page."[16]

Fra Lippo Lippi uses everyday phrasing when he says, "Saint Ambrose, who puts down in black and white the convent's friends . . ."[17]

Color superimposed on the same color, gives great intensity. David stands at the door of the darkened tent seeking Saul:

> At first I saw naught, but the blackness, but soon I descried
> A something more black than the blackness, the vast, the upright
> Main prop which sustains the pavilion and slow into sight
> Grew a figure against it, gigantic and blackest of all
> Then a sunbeam that burst through the tentroof showed Saul.[18]

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[15] "Pippa Passes", p. 130.

[16] "Fra Lippo Lippi", p. 345.

[17] "Pippa Passes", p. 135.

[18] "Saul", p. 181.

The light of the sunbeam bursting into the great blackness of the tent is an effective use of light and darkness. By contrast each strengthens the other.

The storm-clouded sky is a "blue black canopy"[19]. Ottima talks of a "fiery black sea"[20]. The moment of death is "the black minute"[21]. In these Browning uses black to create a sense of evil or danger.

Besides the predominating gold and black many other colors are used in Browning's images. Gray conveys a quiet, a dull, even a somber tone. Discouraged, Andrea Del Sarto sees his mood reflected in the atmosphere.

"Only let me sit
The gray remainder of the evening out."[22]

The adjective "undistinguished" reveals what the poet means by using gray.

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[19] "Pippa Passes", p. 132.

[20] "Pippa Passes", p. 133.

[21] "Prospice", p. 395.

[22] "Andrea Del Sarto", p. 347.

"And the slopes and rills in undistinguished gray
Melt away . . ."[23]

The calm water is gray.

The rocks, though unseen,
That ruffle the gray glossy water
To glorious green[24]

Without mentioning any specific color, one gets the same idea of extreme calm from this line:

"Where the quiet-colored evening smiles."[25]

The color red appears in Browning's imagery as much as either black or gold. In part, it is the poet's partiality toward red that accounts for the flame, blood, and wine images. In imagery other than these, red occasionally is found.

Day "shot one grim red leer"[26] as Roland turned from the highway.

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[23] "Love Among the Ruins", p. 172.

[24] "The Englishman in Italy", p. 261.

[25] "Love Among the Ruins", p. 171.

[26] "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came", p. 287.

A few stanzas after, in the same poem, the knight remembers one of his friends:

"I fancied Cuthbert's reddening face
Beneath its garniture of curly gold."[27]

While gold, black, and red are the predominating colors in Browning's imagery, a great variety of other colors are scattered through the poetry.

In most cases, Browning does not paint a whole scene in nature in color just to delight the eye of the reader. On occasion, however, he can do a very artistic portrayal of beautiful scenery. Note that gold, black, and light itself predominate in this image:

Fancy the Pampas' sheen!
Miles and miles of gold and green
Where the sunflowers blow
In a solid glow,
And--to break now and then the screen--
Black neck and eyeballs keen,
Up a wild horse leaps between![28]

Blood

Perhaps at this point blood imagery should be discussed. As has been stated previously, it is not merely the color that makes blood so attractive to

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[27] "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came", p.287.

[28] "A Lovers' Quarrel", p. 173.

Browning. On the other hand, he is not using blood merely to create a mysterious or horrible mood. Besides its color, some of the sense of excitement or of conflict that blood conveys attracts the poet's imagination. It is rather strange to find blood imagery used so extensively in the type of psychological, love, or dramatic poetry in which Browning specializes. It is such imagery as would be expected in the poems of Edgar Allen Poe. Yet at the most unexpected moments, Browning introduces blood imagery in such a manner that it is really effective.

The ray of morning sunshine is "this blood-red beam".[29]

This next image certainly shows an uncommon train of thought:

"You might see our thickest yellow tapers . . . sink down on themselves in a gore of wax."[30]

One almost gets the impression that the candle is some defeated warrior who has so many wounds that he sinks dead into a pool of his own blood.

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[29] "Pippa Passes", p. 131.

[30] "Pippa Passes", p. 142.

Even lightning breaking through the heavens is treated as a weapon which wounds the heavens.

> In at heaven and out again,
> Lightning!--Where it broke the roof
> Bloodlike, some few drops of rain.[31]

Hatred and horror certainly are reflected in the bitter image from "The Italian in England":

> I would grasp Metternich until
> I felt his wet throat distil
> In blood through these two hands . . .[32]

Another example of his grotesque blood imagery is found in "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came". Even in the mud there are signs of blood.

> "Thin dry blades prick the mud
> Which underneath looks kneaded up with blood."[33]

With the exception of the sunbeam image, the previous figures of speech used blood either for its connection with war or wounds, or for the horror it would create. Now we will deal with some blood figures that use blood primarily for its color.

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[31] "A Serenade at the Villa", p. 189.

[32] "The Italian in England", p. 259.

[33] "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came", p. 287.

That crimson the creeper's leaf across
Like a splash of blood, intense, abrupt,
O'er a shield of else gold from rim to boss.[34]

That there might be a connection between Browning's interest in blood imagery and in wine imagery is shown by this image. Moreover, it further illustrates the color interest in his blood imagery.

Grape-harvest began.
In the vat, halfway up in our house-side
Like blood the juice spins.[35]

Once more there is indication that the color has much to do with Browning's blood imagery.

"The wild tulip, at end of its tube, blows out
its great red bell
Like a thin clear bubble of blood, for the
children to pick and sell."[36]

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[34] "By the Fireside", p. 185.

[35] "The Englishman in Italy", p. 260.

[36] "Up at a Villa--Down in the City", p. 174.

Sun

All the other imagery to be considered in this secion is formed by objects having the power to give light and heat. In each there is a certain strength and a symbolic meaning that has existed for man since the beginning of recorded history. The worship of sun and fire is basic in many ancient religions. How many poetic and philosophical lines have been written about the inspirational value of the stars! Strength, power, a certain ability to turn men's minds towards spiritual life, the ability to give light, the heat-giving qualities, and the colors of flame and the heavenly bodies make them subjects which have great figurative meaning for Browning.

It has sometimes been said that Browning is a poet of the sun, more particularly of the sunrise. Many poets have been captivated by the romantic character of night, or twilight, but the comparative position each holds in Browning's affection might be brought out by a quotation from his own poetry.

". . . succeed with life's dayspring,

death's minute of night."[37]

Or again in "Prospice" he refers to death as "the black minute".[38] The reawakening after death (accompanied by the appearance of his wife) is "a light."[39] Thus in both quotations life is connected with day, while night is symbolic of death.

Pippa talks about day's "fitful sunshine minutes".[40] A few moments later the girl pretends that she pursues a fleeing sunbeam.

> Aha, you foolhardy sunbeam, caught
> With a single splash of my ewer!
> You that would mock the best pursuer,
> Was my basin over deep?
> One splash of water ruins you asleep
> And up, up fleet your brilliant bits
> Wheeling and counterwheeling,
> Reeling, broken beyond healing:
> Now, grown together on the ceiling![41]

This is a particularly observant description of the action of sun rays whose beams are broken by some intervening object.

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[37] "Saul", p. 183.

[38] "Prospice", p. 345.

[39] "Prospice", p. 345.

[40] "Pippa Passes", p. 129.

[41] "Pippa Passes", p. 129.

Many things suggest sunshine to Browning. Even the lowly insect is a friend of the sun!

> When I was young, they said if you killed one
> Of those sunshiny beetles, that his friend
> Up there, would shine no more that day nor next.[42]

The close union between the sun and life is shown here by contrast.

> "Death stepped tacitly and took them where they never see the sun."[43]

From David's lips come some of the poet's finest images. The fact that David was an inspired singer seems to have been ever before Browning's mind as he created the imagery in this poem. This long simile makes Saul's achievement like that of the sun.

> Every deed thou hast done
> Dies, revives, goes to work in the world; until e'en as the sun
> Looking down on the earth, though clouds spoil him, though tempests efface,
> Can find nothing his own deed produced not, must everywhere trace
> The results of his past summer-prime--so, each ray of thy will,
> Every flash of thy passion and prowess, long over, shall thrill
> Thy whole people ... .[44]

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[42] "Pippa Passes", p. 141.

[43] "A Toccata of Caluppi's", p. 175.

[44] "Saul", p. 182.

Pippa, who seems very fond of the sun, uses the sunbeam to represent happiness. If the day were gloomy, Pippa believed that the newly married Phene and Jules would not be disturbed.

"Hand clasping hand, within each breast
would be
Sunbeams and pleasant weather spite of thee."[45]

Since Browning is well known for his especially apt imagery of sunrise, let us note some of them.

Several times parts of "Pippa Passes" opening lines have been used as examples of certain kinds of images. Now we shall take the whole passage.

Day!
Faster and more fast
O'er night's brim, day boils at last:
Boils, pure gold, o'er the cloud-cup's brim
Where spurting and suppressed it lay,
For not a froth-flake touched the rim
Of yonder gap in the solid gray
Of the eastern cloud, an hour away;
But forth, one wavelet, then another curled,
Till the whole sunrise, not to be suppressed,
Rose, reddened, and its seething breast
Flickered in bounds, grew gold and overflowed
the world![46]

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[45] "Pippa Passes", p. 129.

[46] "Pippa Passes", p. 129.

The Italian patriot was awaiting the peasant girl's return, but he wasn't worried.

"I was no surer of sunrise
Than of her coming . . ."[47]

A storm is over, and the sun breaks through the clouds.

Ah, see! The sun breaks o'er Calvano;
He strikes the great gloom
And flutters it o'er the mount's summit
In airy gold fume.[48]

Yet Browning creates some excellent figures of speech whose subjects are sunset. From "Rabbi Ben Ezra", this sunset image is taken.

For note, when evening shuts
A certain moment cuts
The deed off, calls the glory from the gray.
A whisper from the west
Shoots--'Add this to the rest,
Take it and try its worth: here dies another day.'[49]

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[47] "The Italian in England", p. 259.

[48] "The Englishman in Italy", p. 261.

[49] "Rabbi Ben Ezra", p. 384.

Saul's deeds have been compared to the work of the sun. Now the eyes of the grieving king are likened to the sunset.

> I looked up and dared gaze at those eyes,
> nor was hurt anymore
> Than by slow palled sunset in autumn, ye
> watch from the shore,
> At their sad level gaze o'er the ocean- a
> sun's slow decline
> Over the hills . . .[50]

Throughout the poems of Browning one could continue to point out sun imagery.

Star

It is not only our nearest star which finds a prominent place in a study of Browning's imagery. All stars and other heavenly bodies, are found repeatedly. A very thorough study of the frequency and meaning of star imagery in all Browning's poetry is made by Charles Smith in Browning's Star Imagery.[51] Charles Smith considered light images one of the main types of imagery found in Browning's poetry. From the

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[50] "Saul", p. 181.

[51] Smith, Charles Willard, Browning's Star Imagery. Princeton U. Press, Princeton, J.J., 1941.

many kinds of light imagery in the poems, he selected star imagery for a detailed consideration. All the poems (with the exception of those based upon translations from the Greek) have been examined to determine the frequency, the symbolic meaning, and the structural function of the star images. The relation of the star image to the design of the poem in which it occurred is considered. Finally the relationship between Browning's star imagery and his general development as an artist are studied. The survey in this thesis will be merely indicative of general employment of star imagery in Browning's poetry.

The entire poem "My Star" is an image. Dedicated to his wife, the poem speaks of her metaphorically as a star. Since Browning holds his wife in highest regard as a poet and person he will select to describe Elizabeth, an object which to him means all that is great and noble.

Stars have different but similar meaning in most of these excerpts. Their symbolic meaning generally is either the ideal, the inspiration toward the ideal, or the achievement of the ideal.

In this stanza is the questioning of a young man who wishes that his beloved would become the fixed inspiration in his life.

> Must I go
> Still like the thistle-ball no bar,
> Onward, whenever light winds blow
> Fixed by no friendly star?[52]

The artist thinks about the success of a younger, more famous painter.

> --Never did fate forbid me, star by star
> To outburst on your night with all my gift
> Of fires from God . . .[53]

The painter continuing his monologue fancies he might have taught the youth before he gained fame:

> ". . . And youth, the star not yet distinct
> Above his hair, he learning at my feet!"[54]

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[52] "Two in the Campagna", p. 189.

[53] "Pictor Ignotus", p. 341.

[54] "Pictor Ignotus", p. 341.

Nature, the composer believes, is matching his attempts to bring the earth and heaven closer.

> Novel splendors burst forth, grew familiar
> and dwelt with mine,
> Not a point nor peak but found and fixed its
> wandering star:
> Meteor-moons, balls of blazes: and they did
> not pale nor pine
> For earth had attained to heaven, there was
> no more near or far.[55]

Abt Vogler dompares the creation ofbbeautiful music to a star:

> "And I know not if, save in this, such gift
> be allowed to man,
> That out of three sounds he frame not a fourth
> sound, but a star."[56]

The whole universe is alive with Divine inspiration. The stars thrill with the same imparted knowledge that fills the soul of David.

> "And the stars of night beat with emotion and
> tingled and shot
> Out in fire the strong pain of pent knowledge,
> but I fainted not."[57]

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[55] "Abt Vogler", p. 382.

[56] "Abt Vogler", p. 383.

[57] "Saul", p. 184.

The following images simply show the poet's fondness for the stars without endowing them with any symbolic significance.

"You might see our thickest yellow tapers twist suddenly in two, each like a falling star."[58]

Fra Lippo Lippi emphasizes his certainty:

> . . . why, I see as certainly
> As that the morning star's about to shine,
> What will hap some day . . .[59]

Fire

Fire with many different implications adds a glow to innumerable verses in Browning's works. Fire has many qualities which incline the poet toward it. It is red, produces light, and gives heat. Power and energy radiate from its flames.

Often fire represents the quality of life or the spirit of courage in his figures. Roland is desperately seeking memories which will give him strength to continue his quest. For a while recalling Cuthbert pleases him, but his mind recalls too much.

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[58] "Pippa Passes", p. 142.

[59] "Fra Lippo Lippi", p. 344.

". . .Alas, one night's disgrace!
Out went my heart's new fire and left it
cold."[60]

In other images it is the action of the leaping tongues of flame that inspire the imagery.

"Where the domed and daring palace shot its
spires
Up like fires."[61]

Caliban describes sunbeams striking upon the sea as "meshes of fire"[62].

Later when the afternoon has become stormy, he uses fire to picture the lightning which to him foreshadows the wrath of Setebos.

"And fast invading fires begin!
White blaze."[63]

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[60] "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came", p.287.

[61] "Love Among the Ruins", p. 172.

[62] "Caliban Upon Setebos", p. 392.

[63] "Caliban Upon Setebos", p. 394.

Another person sees the previous disaster of his comrades, and the foretelling of his own in fire. The other knights who sought the dark tower look upon Roland's impending fate.

". . . in a sheet of flame
I saw them and I knew them all . . ."[64]

A young man's desire for great achievement is represented by fire.

"Mine be some figured flame which blends,
transcends them all."[65]

Lack of this ambition and imspiration is called fireless.

"Low kinds exist without,
Finished and finite clods, untroubled by a spark."[66]

Andrea Del Sarto rembers Rafael's commission to paint at Rome as the time

"When the young man was flaming out his thoughts
Upon a palace wall for Rome to see."[67]

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[64] "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came", p.289.

[65] "Rabbi Ben Ezra", p. 383.

[66] "Rabbi Ben Ezra", p. 383.

[67] "Rabbi Ben Ezra", p. 384.

The soul itself is described as a fire, by Fra Lippo Lippi's superior.

"Man's soul and it's a fire, smoke . . ."[68]

The enthusiastic French court according to Andrea is "such a fire of souls."[69]

The troubles and experiences of life are the fires which test the mettle of a man.

> Youth ended, I shall try
> My loss or gain thereby,
> Leave the fire ashes, what survives is gold.[70]

The ambitious grammarian wishes to see all of life before he decides how he will live any of his own.

> Image the whole, then execute the parts--
> Fancy the fabric
> Quite, ere you build, ere steel strike fire
> from quartz.[71]

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[68]"Andrea Del Sarto", p. 347.

[69]"Fra Lippo Lippi", p. 344.

[70]"Andrea Del Sarto", p. 347.

[71]"A Grammarian's Funeral", p. 279.

The eyes of animals are sometimes depicted as on fire. Pippa sings of a python "With forky tongue and eyes on flame."[72]

Caliban sees fire in the eye of another creature:

"Yon auk, one fire eye in a ball of foam."[73]

One of the comforts the bishop expects within his tomb is to "feel the steady candle-flame"[74].

Things that come before the sight or mind emphatically are represented as a fire.

"And on his sight the angel burned."[75]

Childe Roland gazed at the landscape.

"Burningly it came on me all at once
This was the place . . ."[76]

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[72]"Pippa Passes", p. 141.

[73]"Caliban Upon Setebos", p. 392.

[74]"The Bishop Orders His Tomb at Saint Praxed's Church", p. 349.

[75]"The Boy and the Angel", p. 254.

[76]"Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came", p.288.

It has been demonstrated that images of light and color are repeatedly used by Robert Browning. The attributes of strong color and light diffusion cause the poet to incorporate sun, star, wine, blood, and flame imagery in his work. It might be well to note that the most prevalent colors in these objects are red and gold. There are meaning values beyond the light giving quality or color of the objects which influenced the poet's use of them.

These images give one added understanding of the poet. He has a painter's interest in light and color. His particular favorites show that in his imagery as in all phases of literature and life he liked that which is bright, spirited, inspiring and lends itself to contrast.

CHAPTER III

TOUCH AND FORM IMAGERY

With many people who have full possession of their sight, the sense of touch is only poorly developed. However, Browning's sense of touch is very acute. He is equally sensitive to the form of objects. Realization of form, of course, depends upon a keen sense of sight and of touch.

Many biographers relate how Mrs. Browning believed that Browning had neglected his writing, all during the winter, to devote himself to clay modeling. This dabbling in sculpturing did not result in any worthwhile contribution to that art, but it did develop, further, his already deep awareness of the feeling and shape of objects. This increased awareness results in a host of touch and form images.

John Kester Bonnell has written an article called "Touch Images in the Poetry of Robert Browning" [1] to call attention to an aspect of Browning's poetic imagery which he believed had been overlooked. He stated that the images quoted had been selected more or less at random to indicate how frequently and how

1 Bonnell, J.K. "Touch Images in the Poetry of Robert Browning" Modern Language Association Vol. 37 p. 574-582 1922

successfully Browning used touch imagery. Bonnell thought that an understanding of Browning's touch images would lead the reader to a better understanding and enjoyment of Browning's poetry.

While all areas of the body possess the sense of touch, it is centered in the hands. Browning shows a remarkable interest in hands. Most people when visualizing God seem to think of Him as a face or a figure, but to Browning He is also a Hand. David tells Saul:

> "A Hand like this hand
> Shall throw open the gates of new life to thee!"[2]

Abt Vogler considers that music, above all other arts, shows special intervention by God. He says, "but here is the finger of God."[2]

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[2] Browning, Robert, The Complete Poetic and Dramatic Works of Robert Browning, Cambridge Edition. Houghton Mifflin Co., N.Y. 1895, "Saul", p. 184. (All references in this section to Browning's works will be from this edition.)

[3] "Abt Vogler, p. 383.

Night is a curtain that is put around the world by unseen hands. These are not touch images, but they do show that Browning had much interest in parts of the human body that receive the most touch sensations.

Some touch images give substances with which one would not associate rough or sharp surfaces, a harsh quality. The white frost covering the meadow might remind one of many things, such as white hair, but only someone who was "finger-tip conscious"[4] could perceive this picture without someone else, like the poet, pointing it out.

"the fields look rough with hoary dew."[5]

In this metaphor, the poet seems to be placing roughness and sting above smoothness. Perhaps it is

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[4]Bonnell, John, "Touch Images in the Poetry of Robert Browning", Modern Language Association of America, Vol. 37, pp. 574-598. Menasha 1922.

[5]"Rabbi Ben Ezra", p. 384.

because fingers becoming accustomed to smoothness, accept it without being conscious of any feeling. If an object is rough, it almost compels the attention of the sense of touch.

> Then welcome each rebuff
> That turns earth's smoothness rough,
> Each sting that bids nor sit nor stand
> but go![6]

Anyone who has walked barefooted across a newly cut hayfield can feel the touch image in these lines.

> "In a day he leaps complete with a few short
> April suns
> 'Mid the sharp short emerald wheat. . ."[7]

While the images above only represent an unsmooth surface, many of the images create an attitude of revulsion. If circumstances demanded that a person approach this tomb, he would hold his body taut lest the least bit of his clothing brush against it. Even then his palms would feel clammy as though moistened

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[6] "Rabbi Ben Ezra, p. 384.

[7] "Up in a Villa--Down in the City", p. 174.

with the liquified body.

". . . Clammy squares which sweat
As if the corpse were oozing through"[8]

This next one is less repulsive than the previous image, but it still has a gruesome tone.

"So with the throttling hands of death at strife
ground he at grammar."[9]

At times abstract things such as a thought or love are considered as though they affected the sense of touch.

For me, I touched a thought, I knew,
Has tantalized me many times,
(Like turns of thread the spiders throw
Mocking across our path) for rhymes
To catch at and let go.[10]

Pippa thinks of love as something she could feel enfolding her.

"Mine should have lapped me round from the
beginning."[11]

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[8] "The Bishop Orders His Tomb at Saint Praxed's Church", p. 349.

[9] "The Grammarian's Funeral", p. 280.

[10] "Two in the Campagna", p. 189.

[11] "Pippa Passes", p. 130.

She thinks of actions in a very similar manner.

"Untwine me from the mass
Of deeds which make up life,"[12]

The opening lines of "Caliban Upon Setebos" form an image which shows extreme though crude delight in the sensation of touch.

('Will sprawl, now that the heat of day is best
Flat on his belly in the pit's much mire,
With elbows wide, fists clenched to prop his chin
And, while he kicks both feet in the cool slush,
And feels about his spine small eft-things course
Run in and out each arm, and make him laugh:[13]

On the other hand, there are touch images which show neither delight nor unpleasant feelings. Jules mentions "the soft-rinded smoothening facile chalk"[14]. As David stoops to enter the tent of Saul his hands

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[12] "Pippa Passes", p. 130.

[13] "Caliban Upon Setebos", p. 392.

[14] "Pippa Passes", p. 136.

and knees feel the "slippery grass patch"[15].

Sometimes a touch image may reveal temperament. This one shows restlessness.

> "She to bite her mask's black velvet, he to finger on his sword."[16]

It is possible to find images in which Browning endows organic material with a sense of feeling very like that of a person.

> "Some think fireflies pretty, when they . . .
> . . .thrid the stinking hemp till the stalks of it seem a-tingle"[17]

These touch images are cited to show that in the group of poems studied, Browning is as conscious of sensations created by his sense of touch as he is of sensations from other senses.

Form images are evident in many of these poems. Pointed things seem to have great appeal for Browning. The spears, swords, and wedges that have been discussed

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[15] "Saul", p. 179.

[16] "A Toccata of Galuppi's", p. 175.

[17] "Up in a Villa--Down in a City", p. 174.

under manufactured things have an additional appeal to him because of their shape.

Browning's attention is caught by the edge of objects. Glee "pursed and scored the edge"[18] of the cripple's mouth. The path of life leads to a crag's sheer edge.[19]

Browning is so interested in giving the form of objects he sometimes gives too many details of the lines and curves and angles of an object. Over-explaining the details has a tendency to confuse readers who are not as form conscious as the poet himself. Instead of seeing the object or scene described, they see only a jumbled mass of lines and corners. This stanza gives a very detailed, but fairly clear picture of form of the landscape.

> Now--the country does not boast a tree
> As you see
> To distinguish slopes of verdure, certain rills,
> From the hills
> Intersect and give a name to, (else they run
> into one)
> Where the domed and daring palace shot its
> spires
> Up like fires

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[18] "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came", p.287.

[19] "By the Fireside", p. 186.

O'er the hundred-gated circuit of a wall
  Bounding all,
Made of marble men might march on, nor be
  pressed,
  Twelve abreast.[20]

Jules has labored to express the ideas of Phene in marble. It is not hard to visualize the statue.

See, I have labored to express your thought.
Quite round, a cluster of mere hands and arms
(Thrust in all senses, all ways, from all sides,
 Only consenting at the branch's end
 They strain toward) serves for a frame to a
 sole face
The Praiser in the center . . .[21]

In the lines below Jules, the sculptor, might be voicing some of Browning's own interests.

. . . I inured myself
To see throughout all nature, varied stuff
For better nature's birth by means of art:
With me each substance tended to one form
Of beauty--to the human archetype
On every side occurred suggestive germs
Of that--the tree, the flower--or take the fruit,

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[20] "Love Among the Ruins", p. 172.

[21] "Pippa Passes", p. 136.

Some rosy shape, continuing the peach
Curved beewise o'er its bough; as rosy limbs
Depending, nestled in the leaves; and just
From a cleft rose-peach the whole Dryad sprang.[22]

Form images abound in "Pippa Passes". This long interrupted image talks about the face with the kind of perspective.

Why, the blank cheek hangs listless as it likes,
No purpose holds the features up together
Only the cloven brow and puckered chin stay in
  their places
. . . . . .
That round great full-orbed face where not an
  angle
Broke the delicious indolence--all broken![23]

The owner of the listless face is thinking of the past.

. . . I felt you
Taper into a point the ruffled ends
Of my loose locks 'twixt both your humid lips.[24]

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[22] "Pippa Passes", p. 136.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid.

His fondness for pointed surfaces extends even to hair.

The sky is not vast formless space above, instead:

> When heaven's pillars seemed o'erbowed with heat
> Its blue black canopy suffered descend
> Close on us both . . .[25]

Fra Lippo Lippi, although a painter rather than a sculptor, still possesses an artist's well-developed sense of form. He points out and asks the guard if he is grateful for:

> yonder river's line
> The mountain round it and the sky above
> Much more the figures of man, woman, child
> These are the frame to?[26]

To make restitution for his night of adventure, the monk promises to paint:

> "God in the midst, Madonna and her babe
> Ringed by a bowery, flowery angel brood."[27]

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[25] "Pippa Passes", p. 132.

[26] "Fra Lippo Lippi", pp. 344-345.

The dying bishop, very anxious about his tomb, observes the columns that will surround his resting place.

"With those nine columns round me, two and two.
The odd one at my feet where Anselm stands."[28]

With a Renaissance desire that the form be perfect, the bishop advises his sons that fewer candles would be better, but that the candles should be in a row.

"Fewer tapers there
But in a row . . ."[29]

The Italian of quality feels that even the position of houses in the city give one a sense of pleasure.

"Houses in four straight lines, not a single
front awry"[30]

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[28] "The Bishop Orders His Tomb at Saind Praxed's Church", p. 349.

[29] Ibid

[30] "Up in a Villa--Down in the City", p. 174.

In stanza after stanza of this poem there is form imagery.

> A turn, and we stand in the heart of things;
> The woods are around us, heaped and dim;
> From slab to slab how it slips and springs,
> The thread of water single and slim,
> Through the ravage some torrent brings!
>
> Does it feed the little lake below?
> That speck of white just on its marge
> Is Pella; see in the evening glow,
> How sharp the silver spear-heads charge
> When Alp meets heaven in snow!
>
> On our other side is the straight-up rock;
> And a path is kept 'twixt the gorge and it
> By a boulder-stone where lichens mock
> The marks on a moth and small ferns fit
> Their teeth to the polished block.[31]

The star, like "the angled spar"[32], is capable of throwing light of different colors. The many planes on the surface of a prism would catch Browning's fancy.

Always fond of the dawn, the poet expresses its coming in a form image.

> "Look out if yonder be not day again
>
> Rimming the rock row."[32]

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[31] "By the Fireside", p. 185.

[32] "My Star", p. 185.

[33] "A Grammarian's Funeral", p. 279.

This image, from the same poem, illustrates Browning's partiality to cleft things.

"(Here's the town-gate reached: there's the marketplace
Gaping before us.)"[34]

Browning tries to satisfy his readers' sense of touch and of form, as well as their sense of sight or of hearing. To him, all are equally important. Harsh, smooth, tickling, and a variety of other touch sensations are created, but one would judge that like Rabbi Ben Ezra he "welcomes each rebuff that turns earth's smoothness rough"[35]. Likewise in form imagery great variety is present, but the majority are concerned with angular, uneven or involved surfaces.

While in comparison to the large amount of human imagery found in these selected poems the touch and form imagery might seem insignificant, it must be remembered that many images which are considered under other catagories must be attributed in part at least to Browning's sensitivity to touch and form.

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[34] "A Grammarian's Funeral", p. 279.

[35] "Rabbi Ben Ezra", p. 383.

CHAPTER IV

NATURE IMAGERY

The term nature poetry usually brings to mind poetry similar to that written by William Wordsworth or other poets of the romantic period. One thinks of a eulogistic or a pantheistic approach to nature. Long passages describing the glories and beauties of natural landscapes are expected. It often implies at least an indirect depreciation of city life and all intensive human developments. Certainly in this sense Browning is anything but a nature poet. His predilection for city life and his admiration for manufactured things are well known. The first section of this thesis offers evidence that human beings, and all their achievement, material and spiritual, are the predominant interest of Browning.

On the other hand, Browning having senses which are extremely well developed, the activities or beauties of nature do not escape his notice. While, for Browning, man, not nature, is the chief created thing; he enjoys nature as the setting for humanity.

Panagyrics of nature are scarce in Browning, but nature images abound. He has marked even the habits of the insects. Within his memory he has a large store of observations from all phases of nature that will serve as allusions in his poetry.

The conventional nature images are not numerous in Browning's poetry, but he has his own type which can best be discussed under these headings.

The main divisions are zoological, botanical, and other nature imagery. Reptiles, insects, birds, and animals will be discussed under zoological. Flowers, plants, and trees will be important subdivisions under images from botany. The miscellaneous imagery will include mountains, imagery from the natural sciences (mining, geology, and the like) and other minor subjects.

Zoological Imagery

Under Browning's zoological imagery the most unusual are his reptile images. At first glance these might seem ugly and out of place in poetry. It must be remembered that the idea that only noble or pretty sentiments be expressed in verse is entirely foreign to Browning's poetic philosophy. The poet was not squeamish

about using the image that best conveyed his train of thought. A few of these snake images are used merely to reveal an uncouth mind or to heighten the sense of horror. However, above all, reptile images that might be shirked by another poet, are used by Browning because he feels the so-called ugly is as poetic as the more pleasant.

It seems strange but the snake image in "Saul" actually is highly poetic and borders on the beautiful.

> He stood as erect as that tent prop, both arms stretched out wide
> On the great cross-support in the center, that goes to each side;
> He relaxed not a muscle, but hung as caught in his pangs,
> And waiting his chance, the king-serpent all heavily hangs.
> Far away from his kind, in the pine, till deliverance come
> With the spring-time,--so agonized Saul, drear and stark, blind and dumb.[1]

Contrast between the nature of the snake and the worm is made in this image. The snake seems to personify evil (perhaps to the speaker the Austrians or Italian traitors) while the worm seems to mean the weaker and the harmless.

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[1]Browning, Robert, The Complete Poetic and Dramatic Works of Robert Browning, Cambridge Edition. Houghton, Mifflin Co., N.Y., "Saul", p. 180. (All references to Browning's poems in this section are from this edition.)

Our Italy's own attitude
In which she walked thus far and stood
Planting each foot so firm
To crush the snake and spare the worm.--[2]

All nature surrounding the dark tower seems perverse.

One of the things that makes even little garden snakes frightening is the complete unexpectedness of their appearance. Browning wisely capitalizes on a snake association which is unpleasant. (On the other hand in "Saul" by the helplessness of the serpent he is able to arouse a certain sympathy that subordinates the usual dislike for snakes.)

"A sudden little river crossed my path
As unexpected as a serpent comes."[3]

The uxorious Andrea Del Sarto, at least subconsciously, knows the real nature of his wife. In one word of a supposedly complimentary speech beautiful Lucrezia is characterized. Like the biblical serpent she has offered temptation to a person too weak to want to resist. This one evening he is perhaps a little nearer to realizing what might have been. His lips

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[2] "The Italian in England", p. 259.

[3] "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came", p. 288.

unwittingly picture her as she really is.

". . . So! keeping looking so-

My serpentining beauty, rounds on rounds![4]

Caliban's half-bestial mind would see the lower nature of all things. The movement of the sea would quite naturally remind him of a snake.

"And snaky sea which sounds and ends the same."[5]

The sea is particularly snakelike for Caliban. This image is rather an ugly one.

. . .well one wave
Feeling the foot of Him upon its neck,
Gaped as a snake does, looled out its large tongue
And licked the whole labor flat. . .[6]

Worms hold less fascination for the poet. Their means of locomotion or their tendency to surround things decayed are the qualities emphasized. Here the locomotion and the objection of the lowly worm are the reason for the image.

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[4] "Andrea Del Sarto", p. 346.

[5] "Caliban Upon Setebos", p. 392.

[6] "Caliban Upon Setebos", p. 393.

. . . a pale wretch . . .
Who through some chink had pushed and pressed
Worm-like into the temple.[7]

The smallness of a worm's puncture is the important quality here.

What of the hasty word?
Is the fleshly heart not stirred
By a worm's pin-prick
Where its roots are quick?[8]

The craftiness attributed to all reptiles shines for the suspicious bishop in the eyes of his sons.

"Ever your eyes were as a lizard's quick."[9]

Browning finds that an understanding of many things is heightened by allusions to insects. Beautiful members of the insect family appear many times. For a moment Caliban, wishful that Setebas may become more merciful, grows poetic. It refers to quiet.

". . . or suppose, grow into it
As grubs grow butterflies: . . ."[10]

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[7] "Pippa Passes", p. 141.

[8] "A Lovers' Quarrel", p. 173.

[9] "The Bishop Orders His Tomb at Saint Praxed's Church", p. 349.

[10] "Caliban Upon Setebas", p. 354.

The ephemeral quality of the people of Venice somewhat in contrast with Tocatta's deeper nature is referred to in this verse.

> "Butterflies may dread extinction--you'll not die,
> it can not be!"[11]

An exalted metaphor sees similarity between a butterfly and a soul.

> Look at the woman here with the new soul,
> Like my own Psyche;--fresh upon her lips
> Alit, the visionary butterfly,
> Waiting my word to enter and make bright,
> Or flutter off and leave all blank as first.[12]

Images can be very realistic.

> Where he seeks sweetness' soul, he may find this!
> --As in the apple's core, the noisome fly:
> For insects on the rind are seen at once
> And brushed aside as soon, but this is found
> Only when on the lips or laughing tongue.[13]

Fly images seem to tend toward the practical.

> What of the hasty word?
> . . . . . .
> See the eye, bu a fly's foot blurred--[14]

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[11] "A Tocatta of Galuppi's", p. 175.

[12] "Pippa Passes", p. 138.

[13] Ibid., p. 136.

[14] "A Lovers' Quarrel", p. 173.

The meaning seems to be that a trivial thing can at least momentarily spoil something much more important.

With this cricket reference the poet expresses well the disturbing warning tone that certain music voices.

> Yes, you like a ghostly cricket, creaking where
> a house was burned:
> Dust and ashes, dead and done with,
> Venice spent what Venice earned.[15]

Close observation of two living things account for this figure.

> ". . . lichens mock
> The marks on a moth . . ."[16]

On occasion Browning simply becomes merry. The rhythm and rhyme of this poem indicate the lighthearted tone.

> "The King hailed his keeper, an Arab
> As glossy and black as a scarab,"[17]

A spider appears in a double simile. In the second part of the comparison the similarity between quails

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[15] "A Tocatta of Galuppi's", p. 175.

[16] "By the Fireside", p. 185.

[17] "The Glove", p. 256.

and spiders is pointed out,

"Whose heads,--speckled white
Over brown like a great spider's back."

It is the actions of the spider that are the basis of this image.

"He looks out o'er yon sea which sunbeams cross
And recross till they weave a spider web."[18]

The two kingdoms of animals considered are not among the more common subjects of nature imagery. Birds, however, are the traditional ornaments of poetic images. Some of the images speak of the habits common to all birds, rather than of a particular species. Luigi and his mother talk within the tower.

"With each to each imparting sweet intents
For this new year, is brooding bird to bird."[19]

When others ask to see his sparkling star
"Then it stops like a bird."[20]

This image does not seem very vivid, but he does create bird images that are much more descriptive. There is a good example in Andrea Del Sarto's admission of his

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[18] "Caliban Upon Setebas", p. 392.

[19] "Pippa Passes", p. 130.

[20] "My Star", p. 185.

wife's influence.

"And the low voice my soul hears as a bird
The fowler's pipe, and follows to the snare--"[21]

Most of the bird imagery depends upon the characteristics of some particular kind of bird. The preference of the bat for darkness is important here. The light of fame in the outside world would put too many demands upon Andrea. He prefers to remain in the dimness of small fame and home like the bat.

"And I'm the weak-eyed bat no sun should tempt
Out of the grange whose four walls make his
world."[22]

At times it is the markings of the bird that make it of value in a simile.

"The white skin of each grape on the bunches,
Marked like a quail's crown."[23]

Markings give this simile its volume.

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[21] "Andrea Del Sarto", p. 347.

[22] Ibid

[23] "The Englishman in Italy", p. 260.

Or I tint your lip
With a burnt stick's tip
And you turn into such a man!
Just the two spots that span
Half the bill of the young male swan.[24]

In the same poem the lovers describe themselves again as birds. It is the noise of this particular bird that causes it to be used.

"How we chattered like two church daws!"[25]

A crow is only noisy and often troublesome while a lark is a songster, hence this image.

"Lose a crow and catch a lark."[26]

As a student Fra Lippo Lippi is only a crow, but as an artist he will probably prove a lark.

Using a traditional epithet, the lover addresses his beloved as "my dove".

In general Browning's bird imagery illustrates rather than embellishes his work. The average figure is very short.

Fish imagery is comparatively rare, but those used are very effective. It is Caliban, the inhabitant of an island, who turns to fish to further explain his thoughts.

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[24] "Lovers' Quarrel", p. 173.

[25] Ibid, p. 173.

[26] "Fra Lippo Lippi", p. 343.

Daring since he believes Setabos is unaware of his conversation, he draws a contemptuous simile between a fish and his god.

> . . . 'Hath spied an icy fish
> That longed to 'scape the rock-stream
> where she lived
> And thaw herself within the lukewarm brine
> O' the lazy sea her stream thrusts far amid,
> A crystal spike 'twixt two warm walls of wave;
> Only, she ever sickened, found repulse
> At the other kind of water, not her life,
> (Green-dense and dim-delicious, bred o' the sun.)
> Flounced back from bliss she was not born to
> breathe,
> And in her old bounds buried her despair,
> Hating and loving warmth alike: so He[27]

To express Setebos' ability to take part in myriad activities, Caliban turns once more to fish.

> "The many-handed as a cuttle fish"[28]

Fra Lippo Lippi, far from using fish to allude to a superior being, uses the metaphor to express how low men must be considered when they are hounded by police. Caught returning from an escapade, peeved and a little frightened, he tries to brazen out his interview with the police.

> "Zooks, are we pilchards,--that they sweep the
> streets

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[27] "Caliban Upon Setebos", p.392.

[28] <u>Ibid</u>., p. 393.

And count fair prize what comes into their net!"[29]

A wide variety of animals domesticated and wild serve as image subjects. Most of them do not require that the poet have special or detailed knowledge of the animal mentioned. The figures range from extremely fanciful to conventional.

Bulls have numerical priority in this group. In each case it is the horns of the bull which afford the comparison. The figure in "Up at Villa--Down in the City" is quite imaginative.

"Well now look at our villa! stuck like the horn of a bull
Just on a mountain-edge as bare as a creature's skull."[30]

Hills and mountains seem to remind Browning of bulls.

". . . those two hills on the right
Crouched like two bulls locked horn in horn in fight."[31]

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[29] "Fra Lippo Lippi", p. 343.

[30] "Up at a Villa--Down in the City", p. 174.

[31] "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came", p. 268.

Different, but still as original is this image from "Pippa Passes":

> "And the king's locks curled,
> Disparting o'er a forehead full
> As the milk-white space 'twixt horn and horn
> On some sacrificial bull."[32]

At times the character of one dramatic monologue is prone to use a particular type of image. Caliban turns to serpent and fish allusions. Fra Lippo Lippi finds that his ideas can be made clearer by using animals figuratively. Disgusted at the continual restrictions of the monastery, the monk compares his antics to those of an old horse.

> And I do these wild things in sheer despite,
> And play the fooleries you catch me at,
> In pure rage! The old mill horse, out at grass
> After hard years, throws up his stiff heels so,
> Although the miller does not preach to him
> The only good of grass is to make chaff.[33]

When the police question him for being abroad at night, he feels like a hunted animal. With this metaphor

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[32]"Pippa Passes", p. 140.

[33]"Fra Lippo Lippi", p. 344.

he scolds them.

> Do, - harry out if you must show your zeal
> Whatever rat there haps on his wrong hole,
> And nip each softling of a wee white mouse
> Weke, weke, that's crept to keep him company.[34]

He describes the rapid passing of three young women in such a manner.

> "Like the skipping of rabbits by moonlight,--
> three slim shapes."[35]

At times the animal images are conventional.

> "As the lion when age dims his eyeball . . .
> So with man--so his power and his beauty forever
> take flight."[36]

The lady who tested her suitor in a lion's den is condemned by the court.

> "Lords and ladies alike turned with loathing
> From such a proved wolf in sheep's clothing."[37]

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[34] "Fra Lippo Lippi", p. 342.

[35] Ibid, p. 342.

[36] "Saul", p. 182.

[37] "The Glove", p. 257.

The connection between the two ideas in this simile is rather obvious.

"'Tis a huge fur cloak
Like a reindeer's yoke."[38]

Some images refer to animals without being specific. These lines have reference to the restraining of an animal with some rope like device.

"Leave we the common croft, the vulgar thorpes
Each in its tether."[39]

This mixed metaphor seems to allude to birds and sheep.

"The champaign with its endless fleece
Of feathery grasses everywhere."[40]

Botanical

Botanical imagery includes flowers, plants and trees. Flower images outnumber trees and plant images together. Most of the figures of speech talk about the genus flower rather than about any definite variety.

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[38] "A Lovers' Quarrel", p. 173.

[39] "A Grammarian's Funeral", p. 279.

[40] "Two in the Campagna", p. 189.

While some of the images are very effective, none shows an special knowledge of or emotional interest in flowers. The poet has seen flowers, enjoyed their color and odor, but he is never a botanist or a flower worshipper.

Phene lifts her face to look at Jules. To him her actions are flowerlike.

> they turn
> Like an entire flower upward: eyes, lips, last
> Your chin--no, last your throat turns . . .[41]

In these verses the face is again compared to a flower.

> "The large fingers were pushed, and he bent back
> my head with kind power
> All my face back intent to peruse it as men do
> a flower."[42]

Flowers past blooming are forgotten as the faults of the dead should be.

> When the dead man is praised on his journey--
> Bear, bear him along,
> With his few faults shut up like dead flowerlets.[43]

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[41] "Pippa Passes", p. 135.

[42] "Saul", p. 183.

[43] "Saul", p. 181.

Mrs. Browning's shyness before strangers is characterized thus:

> They fain would see
> My star that dartles the red and the blue
> . . . like a flower hangs furled.[44]

A shallow people are as ephemeral as flowers.

> "As far Venice and her people, merely born to bloom and frop."[45]

The flower image here seems to signify prettiness.

> I shall paint
> God in the midst, Madonna and her babe,
> Ringed by a bowery flowery angel brood.[46]

Speech is likened to the blooming of a flower. Caliban by himself is:

> "Letting the rank tongue blossom into speech."[47]

Occasionally a particular kind of flower appears in a figure of speech. Beautiful delicate women are

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[44] "My Star", p. 185.

[45] "A Tocatta of Galuppi's", p. 175.

[46] "Fra Lippo Lippi", p. 345.

[47] "Caliban Upon Setebos", p. 392.

likened to lilies. Pippa speaks of Jules' bride.

> . . .For are not such
> Used to be tended, flower-like every feature,
> As if one's breath would fray the lily of a
> creature?[48]

Fra Lippo Lippi calls a woman "the little lily thing"[49].

The eminent death of each blooming flower is stressed in this rose image.

> . . . thou diest at last:
> As the lion when age dims his eyeballs, the
> rose at her height,
> So with man--so his power and his beauty
> forever take flight.[50]

This rose image sounds more in the tradition of English love poetry than many of Browning's images.

> . . . I kiss your cheek
> Catch your soul's warmth--I pluck the rose
> And love it more than tongue can speak--
> Then the good minute goes.[51]

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[48] "Pippa Passes", p. 130.

[49] "Fra Lippo Lippi", p. 345.

[50] "Saul", p. 182.

[51] "Two in the Campagna", p. 189.

Plant images are much less frequent. Here are some typical images.

The lover's lack of permanency is well expressed.

> . . . Must I go
> Still like the thistle-ball, no bar
> Onward, whenever light winds blow
> Fixed by no friendly star?[52]

In a highly poetic manner, David tells Saul that writers of the future will give him high place.

> The river's a-wave
> With smooth paper-reeds grazing each other when
> prophet winds rave
> So the pen gives unborn generations their due
> and their part
> In thy being![53]

Within the poems studied tree images are not numerous. However, how carefully and in how much detail a poet treats an image proves his interest as well as the number of times it is used.

Once more from "Saul" comes a magnificient image.

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[52] "Two in the Campagna", p. 189.

[53] "Saul", p. 182.

In our flesh grows the branch of this life, in our
  soul it bears fruit.
Thou hast marked the slow rise of the tree,--how its
  stem trembled first
Till it passed the kid's lip, the stag's antler; then
  safely outburst
The fan-branches all round; and thou mindest when
  these, too, in turn
Broke a-bloom and the palm-tree seemed perfect: yet
  more was to learn,
E'en the good that comes in with the palm-fruit. Our
  dates shall we slight,
When their juice brings a cure for all sorrow? or
  care for the plight
Of the palm's self whose slow growth produced them?
  Not so! stem and branch
Shall decay, nor be known in their place while palm-
  wine shall stanch
Every wound of man's spirit in winter
I pour thee such wine
Leave the flesh to the fate it was fit for!
  the spirit be thine![54]

Although the branches of the palm-tree are only like man's flesh, perishable, the poet gives an inspiring picture of its growth. The fruit of the tree is, as man's soul, capable of continuing good. The wine imagery within the larger image is the climax of the palm-tree image. The metaphor shows a fine appreciation of trees.

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[54] "Saul", pp. 181-182.

The poet seems to think of trees as benificent and protective. The simile below is briefer, but the tone is similar to that of the previous figure.

> That he sat, as I say, with my head just above
> his vast knees
> Which were thrust out on each side around me
> like oak roots which please
> To encircle a lamb when it slumber . . .[55]

Metaphorically Greek becomes a tree whose branches of memories extend to Italy and to youth.

> Greek puts already on either side
> Such a branch-work forth as soon extends
> To a vista opening far and wide
> And I pass out where it ends.
>
> The outside-frame, like your hazel trees--
> But the inside-archway widens fast.
> And a rarer sort succeeds to these,
> And we slope to Italy at last
> And youth by green degrees.[56]

Later the same man at his fireside describes his old fear to propose to his wife lest she refuse. To do so would be like shaking a tree with one leaf.

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[55] "Saul", p. 183.

[56] "By the Fireside", p. 185.

Water Imagery

From the poems under consideration it would seem that water imagery is subordinate in number to botanical or zoological imagery. However, it is used often enough to warrant consideration.

In "Pippa Passes" there is a rather unusual use of water imagery. Twice the girl speaks of a part of the day as water.

"O Day, if I sqander a wavelet of thee."[57]

Still referring to day she says:

"The long blue solemn hours serenely flowing."[58]

Ottima recalls an electrical storm.

" . . . then broke

The thunder like a whole sea overhead."[59]

The relationship between the sound of a great wave breaking on the shore and a rumbling of thunder overhead is brought out well.

The next image is one of the unusual connections which Browning seems to enjoy. Sebald, regretful of a murder, commits suicide. Perhaps it is internal bleeding

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[57] "Pippa Passes", p. 129.

[58] Ibid,

[59] Ibid, p. 132.

that leads him to the water image, or perhaps it is some other feeling that occurs with the coming of death about which he speaks.

> My brain is drowned now--quite drowned: all I feel
> Is . . . is,at swift-recurring intervals,
> A hurrying-down within me, as of waters
> Loosened to smother up some ghastly pit:
> There they go--whirls from black sea.[60]

The young man in love claims that his great desire is to:

> ". . . drink my fill
> At your soul's springs,--. . . ![61]

These next images are not purely sea images, but images based on the experience of men sailing the ocean. Marooned by the storm the man and woman walk about the house.

> 'Tis our quarter-deck,
> We are seamen in woeful case.
> Help in the ocean-space![62]

The ship hits a reef no more suddenly or unexpectedly than the knight arrives at the tower.

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[60] "Pippa Passes", p. 133.

[61] "Two in the Campagna", p. 189.

[62] "A Lovers' Quarrel", p. 173.

The tempest's mocking elf
Points to the shipman thus the unseen shelf
He strikes on, only when the timbers start.[63]

There are many other scattered images from nature.

Miscellaneous Nature Images

The nature images already mentioned have been mainly conventional subjects, whether or not they were used in a conventional manner. Many of the miscellaneous images are less in accordance with poetic custom.

A man's eyes are likened to lead[64] while another is called "perishable clay"[65]. A group of men and women are compared to clouds in the western sky at sunset[66].

In the same poem a simile says, "joys prove cloudlets"[67].

Among the objects of nature, mountains are supposed to be favorites of Browning, yet in the poems

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[63] "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came", p.288.

[64] "A Grammarian's Funeral", p. 279.

[65] "Fra Lippo Lippi", p. 343.

[66] "The Glove", p. 257.

[67] Ibid.

studied, mountain images are not numerous. Like the tree images, however, those that are found are beautiful and complete. The lovely mountain image from "Saul"[68] that has been quoted as an example of personification is really a cluster image. While the mountain itself is likened to a man, the whole image is a simile comparing the coming of spring to the mountain to the reviving of hope in Saul. Since the image has been quoted previously, it will not be quoted here, although it is an outstanding example.

There is another excellent mountain image that has been discussed before under personification. The picture of the heads and breasts of mountains pushing up to view the intruder who might learn of their tyranny toward the plains is impressive.[69]

Another mountain image not quoted before might be mentioned. This is much less descriptive. In fact this image like so many other Browning allusions is connected with death.

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[68] "Saul", p. 181.

[69] "The Englishman in Italy", p. 261.

"Is Saul dead? In the depth of the vale make
his tomb-bid arise
A gray mountain of marble . . ."[70]

There are still more nature images that might be investigated as:

"I say, you wipe off the very dew of his youth."[71]

Again:

"Our passion's fruit."[72]

Or even this image:

". . . mistresses with great smooth marbly limbs."

The nature image within these poems shows observation, enjoyment and appreciation, rather than a passionate love of nature. The image is more apt to have a practical or grotesque, or even grim significance than a magnificent or showy effect. Certainly, except perhaps for some of the tree or mountain images, none could be called rich or ornamental and even these exceptions are an integral part of the whole poem.

Considered, however, from the standpoint of number, rather than length, type, or content, nature imagery occupies a considerable place in Browning's imagery.

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[70] "Saul", p. 182.

[71] "Pippa Passes", p. 134.

[72] Ibid, p. 131.

CHAPTER V

IMAGERY IN BOOK ONE OF "THE RING AND THE BOOK"

After having catalogued the imagery in twenty-five poems of Browning, it might be well to study Book One of his longest work, "The Ring and the Book" to see if in general the imagery found there follows or departs from the main types of imagery found in the other poems under investigation.

On the whole this chapter will discuss the main images as they follow in the poem rather than under the headings used in the first four chapters.

The chief image of the book, the ring image, is found in the opening lines. Throughout part one the poet continually returns to the ring image to explain the mixture of fact and fancy in the poem. Actually the first stanza is made up of several images all of which center about the difficulty of making gold into a ring. The gold from which the ring must be formed is:

"Virgin as oval tawny pendant tear
At beehive edge when ripened comb o'erflows"[1]

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[1] "The Ring and the Book", p. 414.

Yet the craftsman has a secret which enables him to mold this soft metal. He mixes it with an alloy which is like melting "wax and honey."[2] By applying the proper acid when the ring is formed the alloy is removed. A ring of pure gold remains.

Before going into the minor images found in these lines, it is best to see how the ring image continues to be used in the poem.

> Now as in ingot, ere the gold was forged
> Lay gold (beseech you, hold that figure fast!)
> So, in this book absolutely truth
> Fanciless fact . . .[3]

Later he says:

> This is the bookful, thus far spake the truth
> The untempered gold, the fact untampered with
> The mere-ring metal ere the ring be made![4]

These two excerpts show that the facts found in the book were the gold from which a ring could be made. More, however, is needed to make the soft metal into a firm form.

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[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid., p. 416.

[4] Ibid., p. 418.

> Fancy with fact is just one fact more
> To wit, that fancy has informed, transpierced
> Thridded and so thrown fast the facts else free,
> As right through ring and ring runs djereed
> And binds the loose, one bar without a break.
> I fused my live soul and that inert stuff
> Before attempting smithcraft.[5]

Like the alloy which will make gold hard enough to be worked, man's fancy binds together the loose facts.

Toward the close of the introduction are these lines:

> Such labor had such issue, so wrought
> This arc, by furtherence of such alloy
> And so, by one spirt, take away its trace
> Till, justifiably golden, rounds my ring.[6]

Now the image is complete. The ring is the completed poem, but into the making of the ring must go gold. The facts are too soft alone, so an alloy, the poet's fancy, must be added. Then through the craftsmanship and labor of the poet they are welded into a ring.

How do these images fit into the grouping of the images in the earlier chapters? It has been shown that in these his chief interest was in human imagery. Here

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[5] Ibid., p. 419.

[6] Ibid., p. 427.

the poet compares his work to that of a skilled maker of jewelry. His poem is a ring. The comparison between writing poetry and skilled work with metals can be classed as a general human image. Moreover, the ring is a manufactured object. Observe, too, how much detail of the manufacturing he gives.

The ring itself is gold, the attractiveness of which has been demonstrated many times.

The secondary images within the cluster image should be considered. The ring is made to match raindrops found sparkling in the April morning. The poet says they were "found alive spark-like." Again his sensitivity to fire imagery is shown.

The soft gold is

"Virgin as oval tawny pendant tear

At beehive-edge when ripened comb o'erflows."[7]

The mixing of gold and an alloy is as melting "wax with honey." This interest in bees and their honey combs might be listed as nature imagery. Moreover, the first of those images has a form image. The tear is "oval" and "pendant".

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[7] Ibid., p. 414.

Thus it can be seen that this one large metaphor contains human imagery, fire imagery, nature imagery, and form imagery.

As the poet passes through a square in Florence, he discovers the book containing the facts. He believes that it was some kind of special guidance by God which caused him to come this way. As mentioned in the chapter on touch imagery, he visualizes God as a Hand.

"(Mark the predestination) when a Hand
Always above my shoulder pushed me once."[8]

Among the goods for sale is an old tapestry, "a proudly purposed web".[9] Form and zoological imagery are both evident in this figure.

Serpent imagery creeps into the lines as he tries to describe the evil nature of the five murderers.

With five--what we call qualities of bad,
Worse, worst and yet worse still, and yet worse yet;
Crest over crest crowning the cockatrice[10]

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[8] Ibid., p. 415.

[9] Ibid.,

[10] Ibid., p. 416.

The increase of emotion and rumor as each group takes sides with either the killers or their victims, is cleverly alluded to, thus:

> That was a firebrand at each fox's tail
> Unleashed in a cornfield; soon spread flair enough
> As hurtled thither and there leaped themselves
> From earth's four corners, all authority.[11]

Principally this is a fire image, although there is an animal image in the use of the fox. It might also be observed that Browning thought of these authorities as coming from scattered places and heaping themselves in some sort of great pile. This shows at least a tendency to try to give a shape or form to what might have been a shapeless crowd as well as a faceless one.

Supporters of the husband find that he once took minor orders. They hope that chrism upon his pate "will neutralize a bloodstain"[12]. This image changes the value of each liquid. Chrism is the holy oils with

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[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid., p. 417.

which a priest is anointed. Browning treats it as a chemical substance which will wash away the punishment of murder. This image is really a transfer in the symbolic value of a substance.

This next image may remind the reader of the horrid image of the Jew's head in "The Bishop Orders His Tomb at Saint Praxed's Church". Being a gentleman, Guido will not turn to law when his honor has been injured; he will defend himself. He will:

> . . . not sit still and whine for law
> As a Jew would, if you squeezed him to the wall,
> Brisk trotting through the Ghetto [13]

The idea of clerical exemption is short-lived.

> "But human promise, or how short of shine!
> How topple down the piles of hope we rear!"[14]

This is at least a light image. Perhaps one might venture to call it a sun image. Hope in piles is a form image.

From the next image quoted, we get a comic effect. Actually the poet admires Pope Innocent, but the image used

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[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid.

hardly sounds respectful.

> Suddenly starting from a nap, as it were,
> A dog-sleep with one shut, one open orb
> Cried the Pope's great self.[15]

In describing the Pope's good judgment, Browning cites as an example his indifference to the Jansenists.

> ('Gainst whom the cry went, like a frowsy tune
> Tickling men's ears--the sect for a quarter of an hour
> I' the teeth of the world which clown-like loves to chew
> Be it but a straw, 'twixt work and whistling while,
> Taste some vituperation, bite away,
> Whether at marjoram--sprig or garlic clove
> Aught it may sport with spoil, and then spit forth.[16]

Certainly an interest in a rather lowly habit of human nature is evinced here.

Browning philosophizes that as notorious as the case was, time has all but wiped out the memory of it.

> Decade trice five, and here's time paid his tax.
> Oblivion gone home with her harvesting
> And all left smooth again a scythe could shave.[17]

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[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid., p. 418.

Personification is followed by a touch image. The scythe is of course a manufactured object, but it is used here primarily to develop a touch image.

Tired of reading the yellow book, the poet goes out into the balcony as a storm brews.

"When flame fell silently from cloud to cloud
Richer than the gold snow Jove rained on
Rhodes,"[18]

If many people saw such beauty in lightning, they could hardly fear it. Gold, flame, and mythological reference create a beautiful figure of speech.

Sunset and blood, two apparent favorites of Browning, are used to reflect the sinister mood the murder has created.

"Against the sudden bloody splendor poured
Cursewise in day's departure by the sun."[19]

Pompilia's parents in trying to make a living sometimes neglect their own souls, but guard carefully the virtue of their daughter.

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[18] Ibid., p. 419.

[19] Ibid., p. 419.

(They) . . . scramble through
The world's mud, careless if it splashed and
spoiled,
Provided they might so hold high, keep clean
Their child's soul, one soul white enough for
three
And lift it to whatever star might stoop.

. . . . . .

I saw the star stoop, that they strained to
touch
And did touch and depose their treasure on,

. . . . . .

I saw the star supposed, but fog o' the fen
Gilded star-fashion by a glint from hell;
Having been heaved up, haled on its gross way
By hands unguessed before, invisible help.
From a dark brotherhood, and specially
Two obscure goblin creatures, fox-faced this,
Cat-clawed the other . . .[20]

What a wealth of imagery in these lines! The girl's soul is white contrasting with the darkness of Guido's friends. Once more the star is the symbol of the ideal to be attained.

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[20] Ibid., p. 419.

Guido might seem a star, but he is gilded by light from hell. His evil supporters are likened to a fox and a cat. The transition from the ideal picture the parents see to the ugly one that Browning views is cleverly done through these images.

The harsh imagery continues, describing Guido as "a starlike pest" that sucks the sweetness of the girl and rolls home a "bloated bubble with her soul inside."[21] One thinks of a snake which swallows its victims whole or some vampire-like creature that lives on another's blood.

The castle to which the hasband brings his bride is a "fissure in the honest earth"[22] which emits smoke blown from the fires of hell.

Bitter imagery now emerges into the trimphant. Pompilia is about to be made a victim.

> Fire laid and caldron set, the obscene ring traced,
> The victim stripped and prostrate: what of God?
> The cleaving of a cloud, a cry, a crash,
> Quenched lay their caldron, cowered i' the dust the crew,
> As in a glory of armor like Saint George,
> Out again sprang the young, good beauteous priest.[23]

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[21] Ibid., p. 419.

[22] Ibid., p. 419.

[23] Ibid., p. 420.

The tormentors are given a witch-like nature. To characterize the contrasting nature of the priest, he turns to the patron saint of England.

But evil does not allow good to remain triumphant. The world is black, and through the blackness pad were-wolves, one of which has flaming eyes. At the door of their victims their eyes become blood-bright, but the wrinkled lips are black. Fire, flame, animal, and blood imagery recreate the horror of the scene.

Once the crime has been committed, they are "safe embosomed by the night again."[24] Blackness seems to be the protector of sinners. When evil seems victor, some change is about to take place. From the darkest moment of night a star emerges.

The opinion of the world wavers. Are these men sheep or wolves? But the shepherd (Pope) knows and condemns.

The story has been almost forgotten. The poet will make it live again. He goes on to reflect that God, not man, can create.

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[24] Ibid., p. 421.

> Man's breath were vain to light a virgin wick,--
> Half-burned out, all but quite-quenched wicks
> o' the lamp
> Stationed for temple-service on the earth
> These indeed let him breathe on and return![25]

Light or fire is always fascinating to Browning.

The curiosity and speculation of the people about the murder is aroused. Any fact is like a stone falling into calm water. A crowd gathers and speculates on the object from the ripples.

> Around the rush and ripple of any fact
> Fallen stonewise, plumb on the smooth face of
> things;
> The world's guess as it crowds the banks o'
> the pool,
> At what were figure and substance by their
> splash.
> Then by vibrations in the general mind
> At depth of deed already out of reach.[26]

The murder is three days over, and Rome recovers from the gloom caused by such a crime.

"A—smoke in the sunshine, Rome is gold and glad."[27]

Whenever joy returns the poet thinks of gold and sun or light.

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[25] Ibid., p. 422.

[26] Ibid., p. 422.

[27] Ibid., p. 423.

The crime is in the past, but the rumors continue. Facts can be discerned later.

> So much for Rome and rumor, smoke comes first!
> Once let smoke rise untroubled, we descry
> Clearlier what tongues of flame may spire and spit.[28]

Guido has been tortured. Browning condemns such a method of gaining information. He believes that religion should have stopped this practice. In a long figure of personification, humanity is a Caliban-like slave of religion. He tortures men to "unhusk the truth a-biding in its hulls"[29]. She uses the information he gains thus, ignoring his method. Finally the brute grows more humane and says he will use the rack no more. Religion pretends that she had forgotten that it was still being used and applauds the slave for breaking it.

The court room in which the trial takes place is well portrayed as being rubbed shiny by the sins of Rome. A sea of wickedness washes against it.

The words of the lawyer are aptly characterized by this metaphor.

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[28] Ibid.

[29] Ibid.

"Language that goes, goes easy as a glove
O'er good and evil, smoothens both to one!"[30]

Rashness and Caution in his speech are like sirens leading the unsuspecting ship and crew to destruction.

Although there is not one to hear his eloquence. the lawyer speaks to hear himself.

> . . . like the cockerel that would crow
> Tries to his own self amourously o'er
> What never will be uttered else than so.[31]

While Guido had any hope of gaining his freedom, he spun lies to help his case.

> All that a man hath that will he give for life
> While life is graspable and gainable
> And bird-like buzzed her wings round Guido's brow,
> Not much truth stiffened out the web of words
> He wove to catch her.[32]

The bird of life eludes the web of falsehood.

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[30] *Ibid.*, p. 425.

[31] *Ibid.*

[32] *Ibid.*, p. 426.

Condemned to die, the count is like a trapped tiger. Notice how the men who come to comfort him and to witness his death add to the horror of the scene by their black hats, black hoods, and black beads. "Crowwise the Brotherhood of Death"[33] arrives.

The grim tale has been outlined. Before turning away from the imagery of this book, let us look at one of the lighter ones which will relieve the tone of evil and gloom that some of the previous imagery has created. This personification reminds one of the personification in "Pippa Passes".

> . . . whether frost in goblin-time
> Startled the moon with his abrupt bright laugh
> Or August's hair afloat in filmy fire,
> She fell, arms wide, face foremost to the world
> Swooned there and so singed out the strength of things.[34]

These images quoted are only some of the main images in Book One. From the same pages it would be possible to take many more, but these are used to indicate how the images in a section of a long work compare with those found in the other poems studied.

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[33] Ibid.

[34] Ibid.

Images are more detailed, more abundant and more colorful in the introduction to "The Ring and the Book" than they are in many of the other poems studied. Most of them seem to be superior examples of the same kinds of imagery discussed in the other chapters. There is a wealth of imagery from humanity in the form of general human images, personification and manufactured articles. The blackness, the gold, the blood, the flame, the star and the sun images quoted are brilliant samples of his use of light and color. The largest number of nature images seem to be zoological rather than botanical. Touch and form images abount.

It is interesting to note that a great many of these images are really several small images blended into one. The opening lines of the poem are a good illustration of this. Grim, humorous, or beautiful, the figures of speech help to heighten the struggle between the dark forces of evil and the brightness of purity and innocence of which the story tells.

CONCLUSION

No generalization about the imagery in Browning's poetry can be made from this study because of the limited number of poems studied. One can not say that the four main types found here are the image subjects which predominate in Browning's poetry. However, by taking images from twenty-five poems that vary in time of composition and in type, one gets a detailed knowledge of the kind of images used in them and the relative frequency of each. It is much like sampling a few pieces of fruit from a large basket. One can not make a judgment about the quality of the entire basket of fruit, but by a detailed knowledge of the quality of the small portion, one would have some basis for forming an opinion.

By limiting the number of poems, it was possible to do a much more detailed study of the images within these poems. Since these poems are not restricted in time or in type, they show that over a great number of years and in varying kinds of poetry, the poet has certain subjects which over and over again appear as an embellishment of his thoughts. His use of certain

images like blood, gold, or human beings so frequently used in the twenty-five poems selected is not proof that these are foremost throughout his poetry. Yet it certainly proves that such subjects occupied a place in his thoughts, not just at one time, but at different times.

Despite the great number of works that have been written about Browning, strangely few studies have been made of his imagery. Before concluding it would be interesting to turn to some of the studies or comments that have been made on Browning's imagery to see how the results of this study compare with their conclusions.

First, a glance at some of the critics who discuss his imagery as a whole. Herford says,

> In each of those four domains, light and color, form, power, and soul, Browning had a profound and in the fullest sense creative joy which in endless varieties and bombinations dominated his imagination, controlled and determined the content, the manner, and the atmosphere of his work.[1]

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[1]Hereford, C.H., Robert Browning. Dodd Mead Co. N.Y., 1905, p. 243.

The results of this study are in almost complete agreement with his conclusion. In the selected poems human images are most numerous, followed by images of light and color. Form images mentioned here in combination with the allied touch images rival nature images in importance. Herford does not place nature among the predominant factors in Browning's interest, but this is due more to the type than to the actual number of images. Power is not mentioned in this study because the images have been studied from the point of view of subject.

Paul de Ruel stresses the great variety and unorthodoxy of Browning's imagery. He is compared to Dante for the colorful appropriateness and sudden familiar humor of his imagery. Many images quoted here could be used to substantiate this judgment.

Turning to statements about particular subjects in Browning's imagery, it would be well to consider Charles Smith's opinion. In the opening lines of his book, Browning's Star Imagery, he states that light and color imagery are among the important types of images in the poet's work. He selects star imagery to study for its symbolic value. His statements confirm the evidence found in Chapter Two.

John Kester Bonnell has written an article declaring that touch images are a considerable though neglected part of Browning's images. De Ruel says that Browning belongs to the school of tactile values. Herford has given the allied sense of form one of the chief places. Chapter Three has added value when considered in conjunction with these worthwhile critical opinions.

There is considerable belief that Browning does not give nature an important place in his poetry. Most people agree that he does not treat nature like the Romantic poets or like other Victorian poets. F.J. Furnivall says,

> He used outward nature, but seldom in his art and mainly as an illustration of some soul-truth, yet when all his vivid bits of descriptive scenery are put together as they have been it is wonderful how effective they are as you follow him through the hours from dawn to dusk.[2]

While Furnivall does not represent the critics who ignore or deny the presence of nature figures in Browning, he is much more conservative in his praise than is Arthur Symons[3]. Symons contends that the poet is able

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[2]Miles, Arthur, The Poets and Poetry of Nineteenth Century. George Routledge and Son, London, 1905. Furnivall, F.J., "Browning", p. 354.

[3]Symons, Arthur, Introduction to the Study of Browning, Dent and Co., 1906, p. 24.

to paint superb landscapes in a line or two. He makes them a part of the emotion of the poem, whereas a long digression would break the spirit. To prove that brief nature images are superior, Mr. Symons declares that such are the nature allusions of Shakespeare and Dante.

In a paper presented to the Boston Browning Society, Emma Marean[4] states that nature was less a means of ornamentation to Browning than it was to Tennyson. To Arnold nature was a refuge. Like Shakespeare he subordinates it to human nature, which is his real interest.

The nature images found in the selected poems in general are briefer than any of his other types of images. Many have the vividness that Symons praises. Practical and grotesque ones are not lacking either.

With the last part of Miss Marean's statement there is almost universal agreement. Above all the poet found worthwhile subjects and worthwhile allusions in his fellow men. We do not have to search for critics to tell us this fact. In the dedication of "Sordello" he says,

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[4]Marean, Emma, The Boston Browning Society Papers, Macmillan Co., Boston, 1897, pp. 471-487.

> The historical decoration was purposely of no more importance than a background requires; and my stress lay on the incidents in the development of a soul; little else is worth study.

His images in his poetry as well as his subjects reflect this attitude.

As a psychologist, lover of human beings, painter, sculptor, and a keen observer and a restrained admirer of nature, Browning created the images found in these poems.

ABSTRACT

The images in twenty-five representative poems of Robert Browning have been analyzed and classified according to content.

To determine the proper classification of Browning's imagery within the selected poems, a preliminary survey of the imagery in more than fifty poems by Browning was made. The images found in the poems examined indicated that the classifications mentioned below were the broad outlines under which the bulk of the poet's imagery would fall.

Other considerations tended to substantiate the value of these classifications. Browning's interest in painting would have developed his sensitivity toward light and color. A man who dabbled at sculptoring would have been very aware of the form and feeling of objects. The subject of most of his poetry showed his great interest in people. It is not surprising that many human images appear. As a man of his own century the poet would be aware of the tradition of English nature poetry which was a part of the Romantic Period in which he was born, and a part of the spirit of many of his Victorian contemporaries such as Arnold and

Tennyson. This love of nature among English poets is so strong that one would suspect that there would be at least a moderate use of nature images in Browning's poetry.

The images are discussed under these headings: images from humanity which include general human images, personification, and manufactured things; images of light and color which include color, blood, sun, star, and flame imagery; images of touch and form; nature images which include zoological, botanical, water, and miscellaneous images; images in Book One of The Ring and the Book.

The conclusion quotes statements that various critics have made about the images in Browning's poetry and compares them to the evidence found in the poems studied.

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